



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

Part 1

THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

Jean Van Hamme

René Sterne

Chantal De Spiegeleer



THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

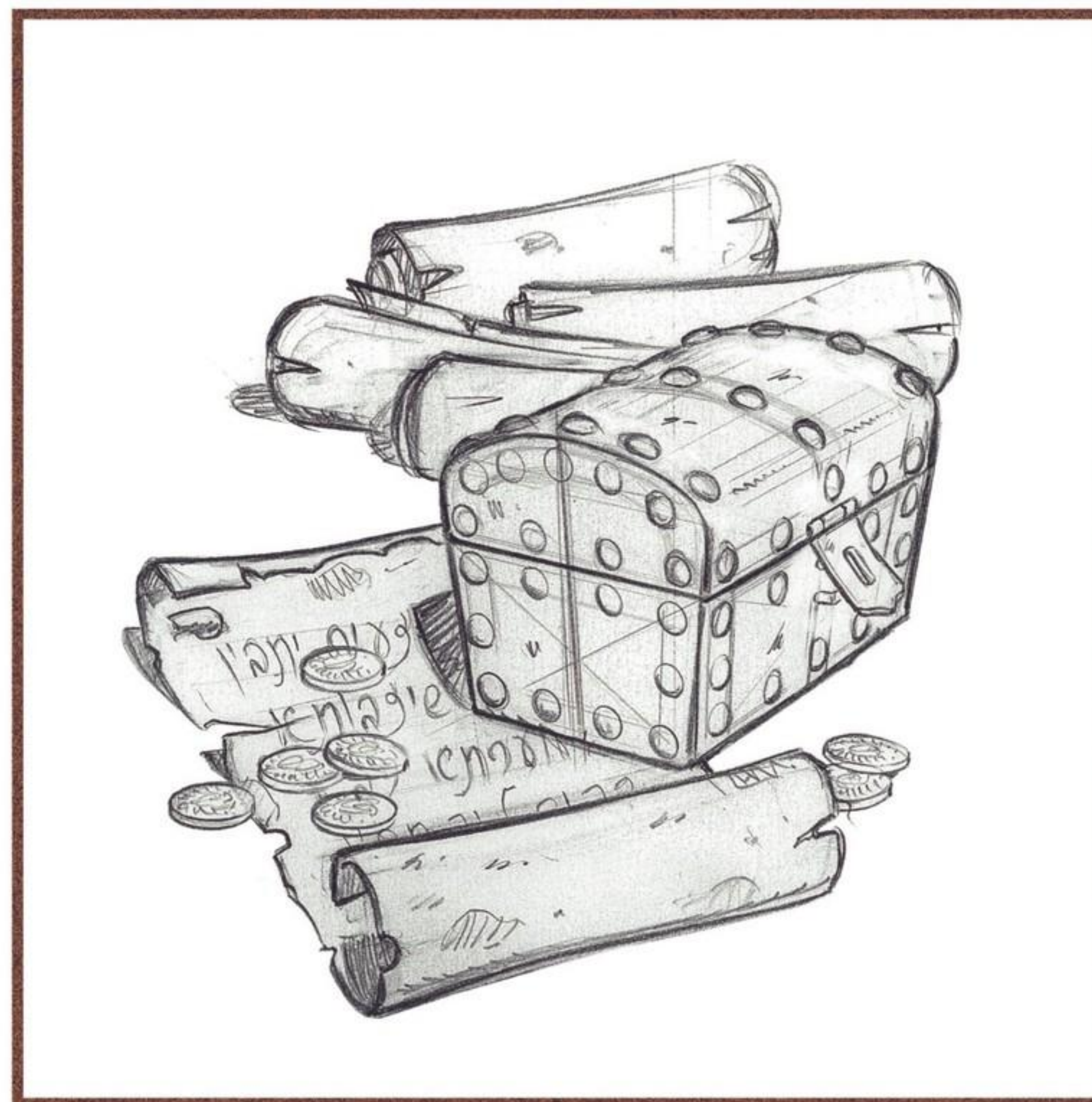
PART 1

THE SCROLL OF NICODEMUS

Script: Jean Van Hamme

Drawing: René Sterne, Chantal De Spiegeleer

Colour work: Laurence Croix, Chantal De Spiegeleer



Based on the characters of
EDGAR P. JACOBS

THIS INCREDIBLE STORY BEGINS ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26TH, WITH A RELATIVELY WEAK EARTHQUAKE (4.2 ON THE RICHTER SCALE) THAT SHAKES, YET AGAIN, THE SEISMICALLY ACTIVE MANI PENINSULA, AT THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE PELOPONNESE.



AS THE AREA IS SPARSELY POPULATED, THERE IS ONLY SLIGHT MATERIAL DAMAGE, AND NO LOSS OF LIFE TO DEPLORE.



BUT A LANDSLIDE CARRIES OFF THE SIDE OF A HILL, AND, WITH IT, WHAT WAS LEFT OF AN ANCIENT RUINED VILLAGE.



TWO DAYS LATER, A LOCAL BOY AND HIS DOG ARE GUIDING A SMALL HERD OF GOATS TOWARDS THE HILL.



HAVING TAKEN STOCK, WITH LITTLE EMOTION, OF THE CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE, THE GOATHERD FINDS A COSY SPOT TO HAVE A BITE.



WHILE HIS DOG...

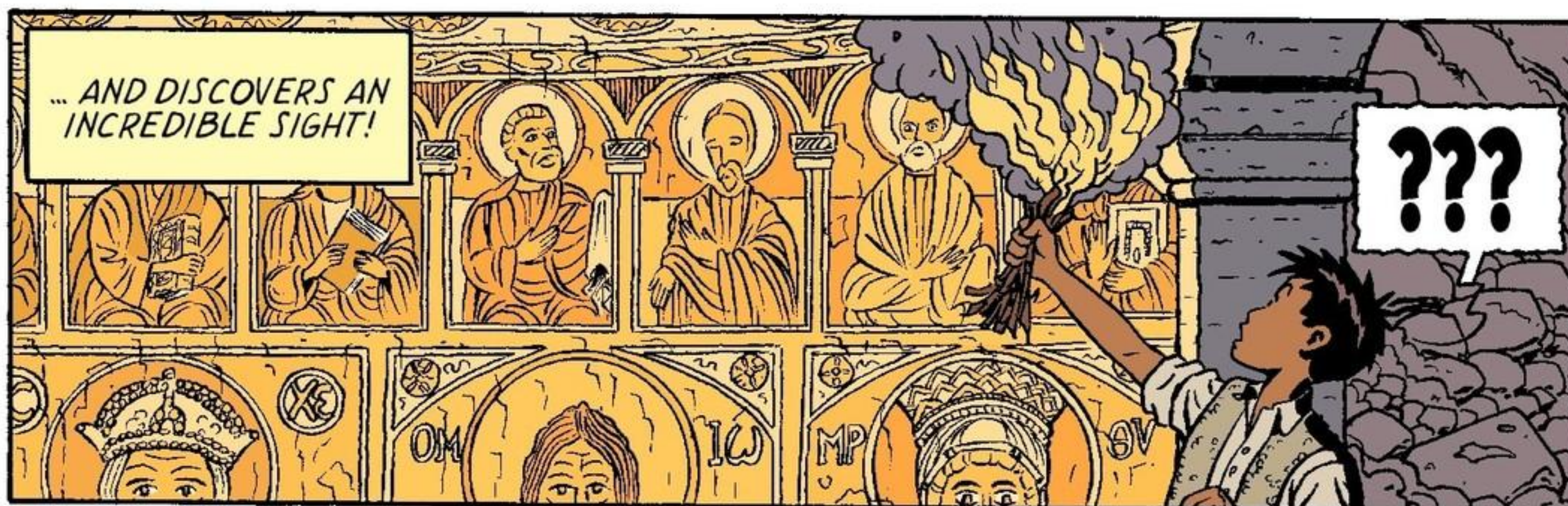
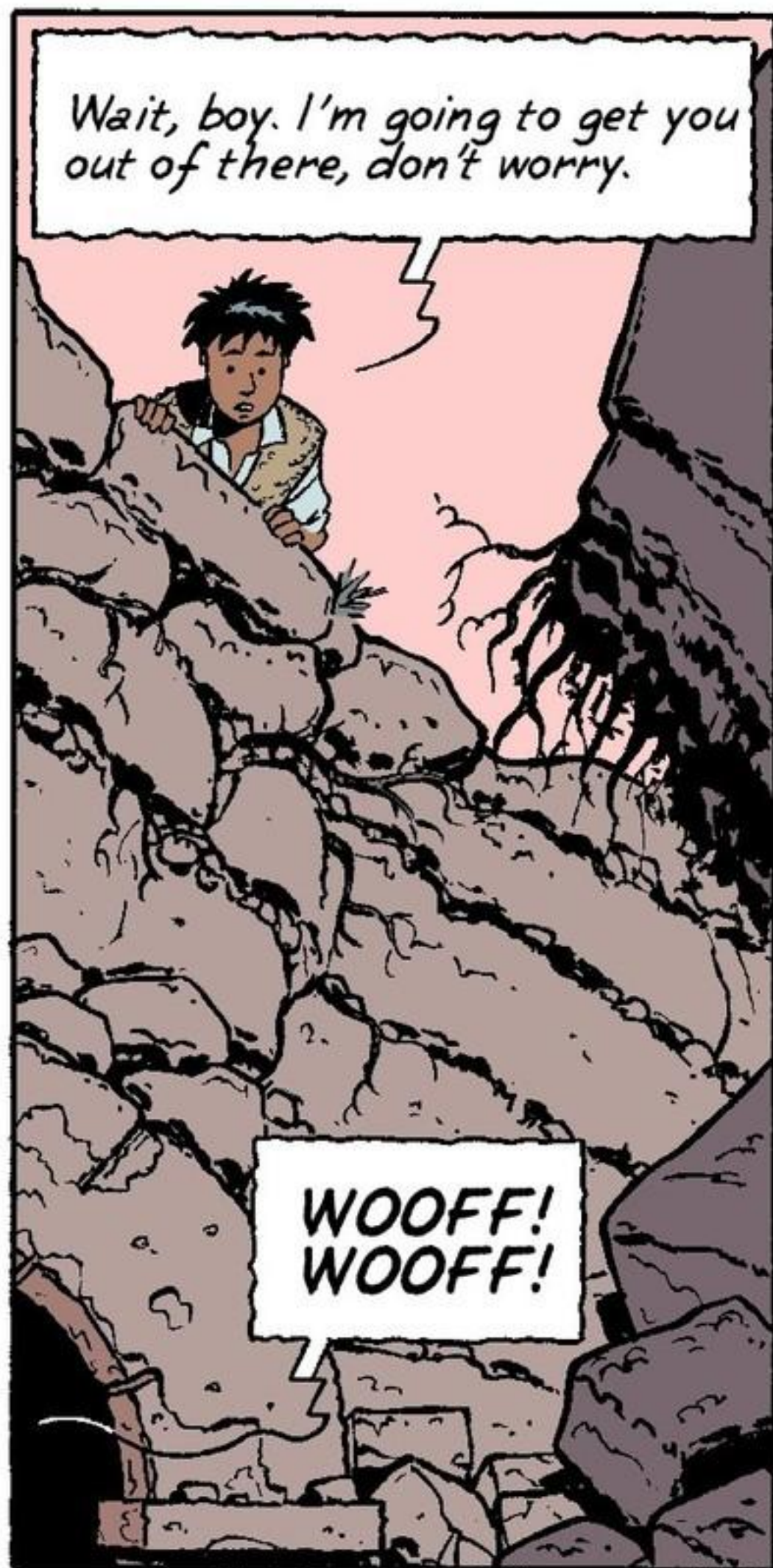
Triton! Come here if you want a bit of sausage!



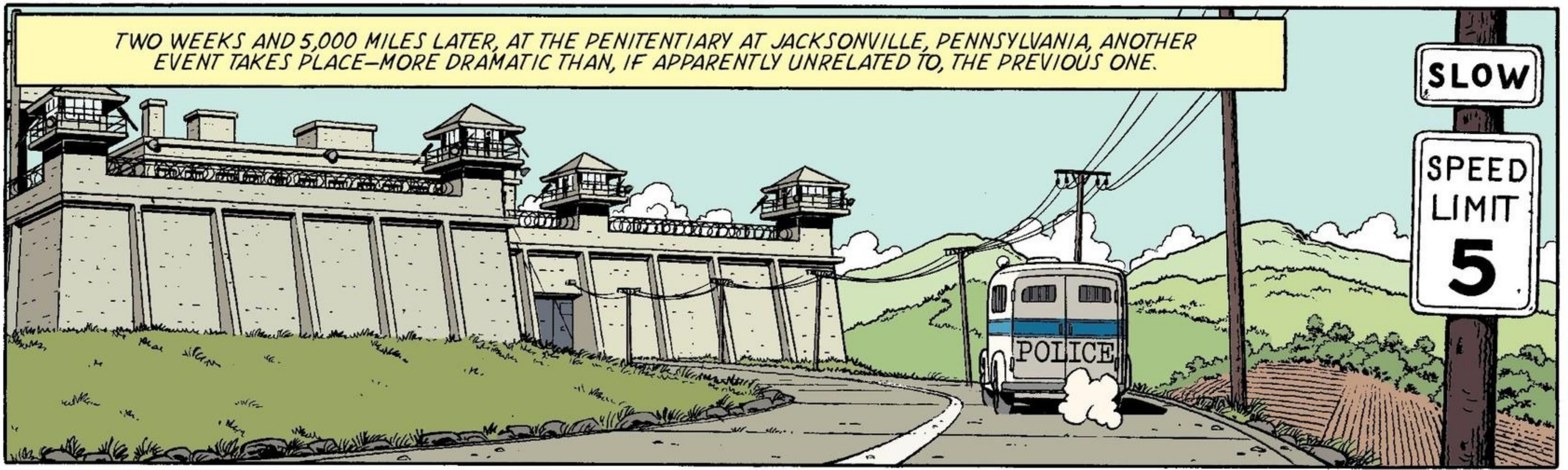
WOOFF...

TRITON?!?...

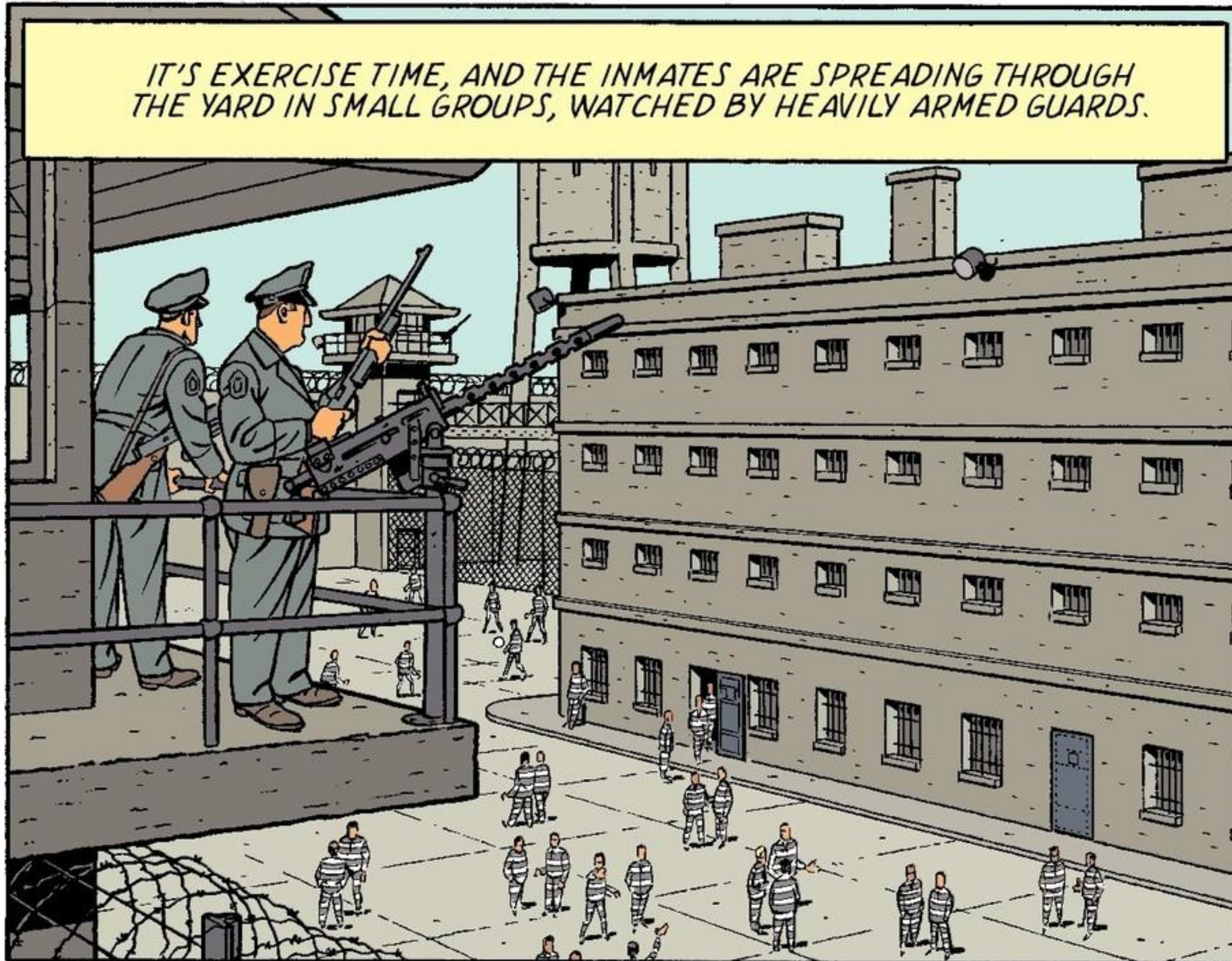




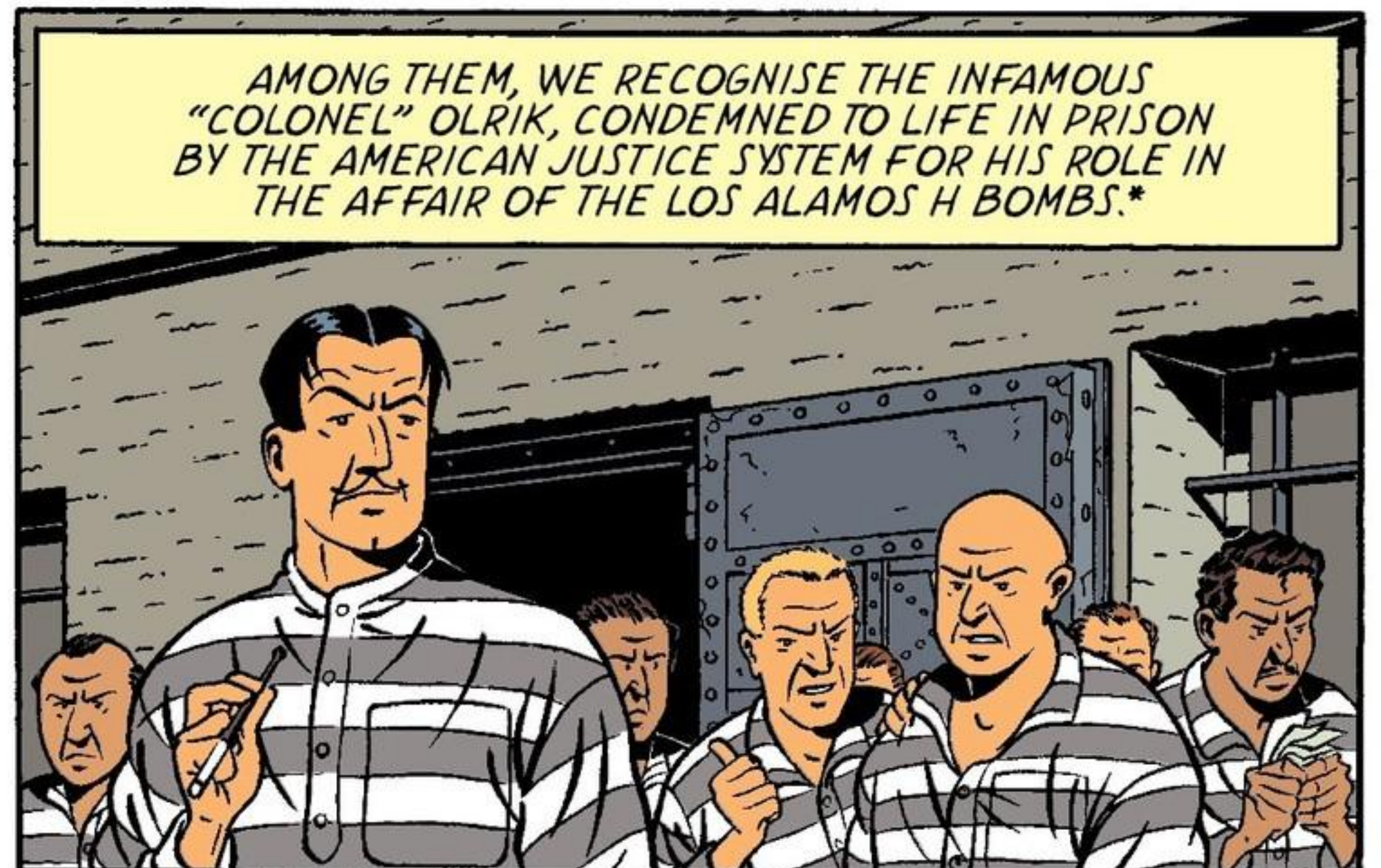
TWO WEEKS AND 5,000 MILES LATER, AT THE PENITENTIARY AT JACKSONVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, ANOTHER EVENT TAKES PLACE—MORE DRAMATIC THAN, IF APPARENTLY UNRELATED TO, THE PREVIOUS ONE.



IT'S EXERCISE TIME, AND THE INMATES ARE SPREADING THROUGH THE YARD IN SMALL GROUPS, WATCHED BY HEAVILY ARMED GUARDS.



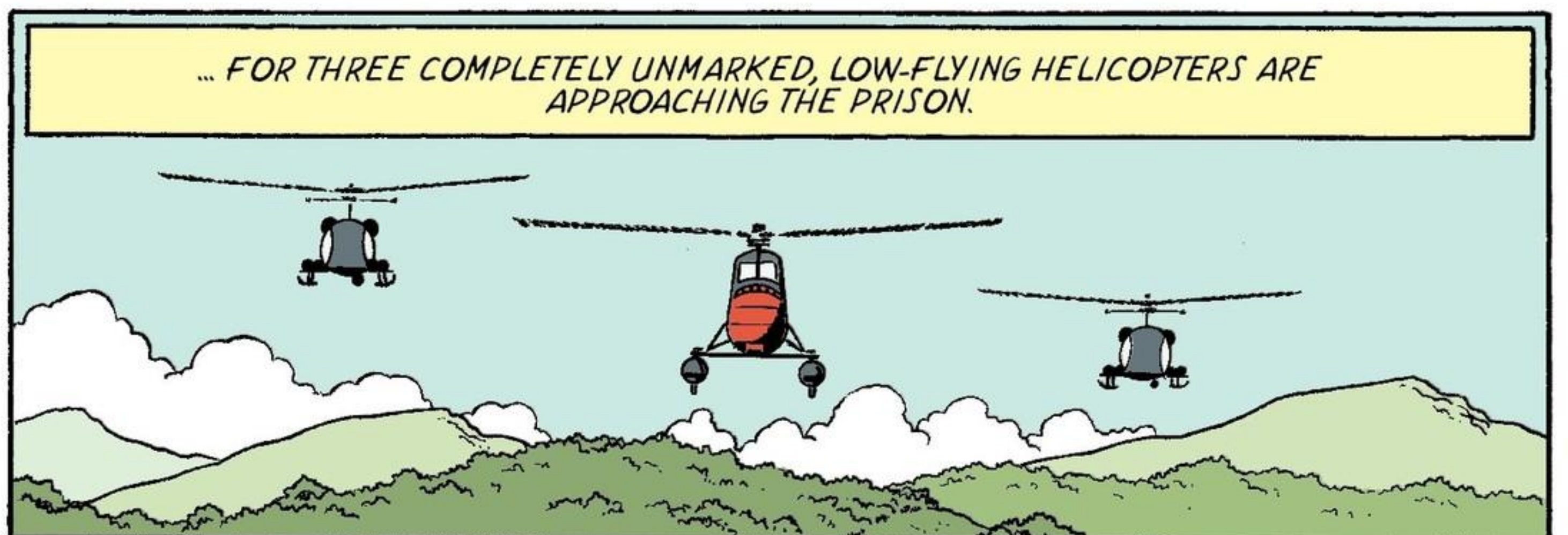
AMONG THEM, WE RECOGNISE THE INFAMOUS "COLONEL" OLRİK, CONDEMNED TO LIFE IN PRISON BY THE AMERICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR HIS ROLE IN THE AFFAIR OF THE LOS ALAMOS H BOMBS.*



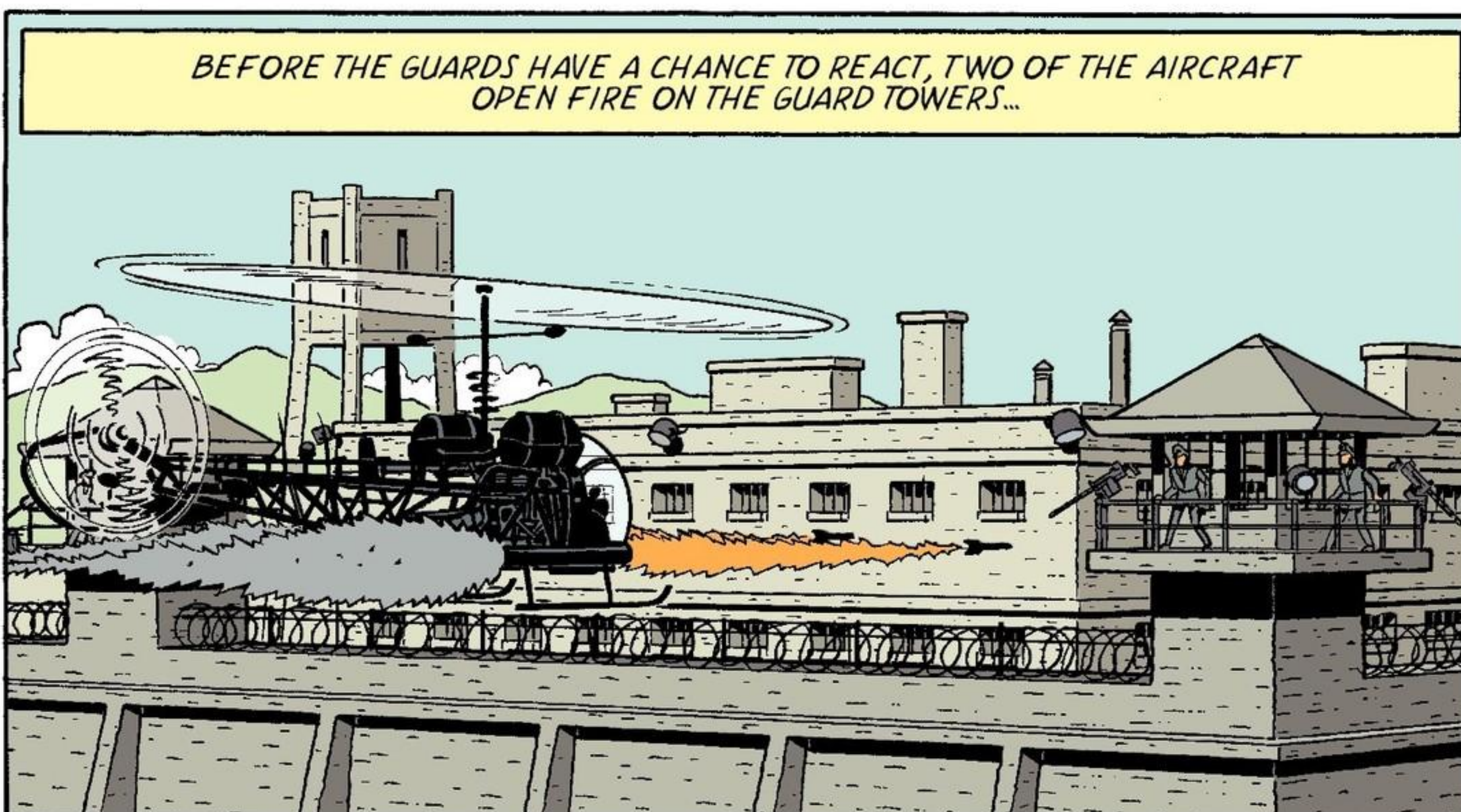
SUDDENLY, THE ALARM SOUNDS...



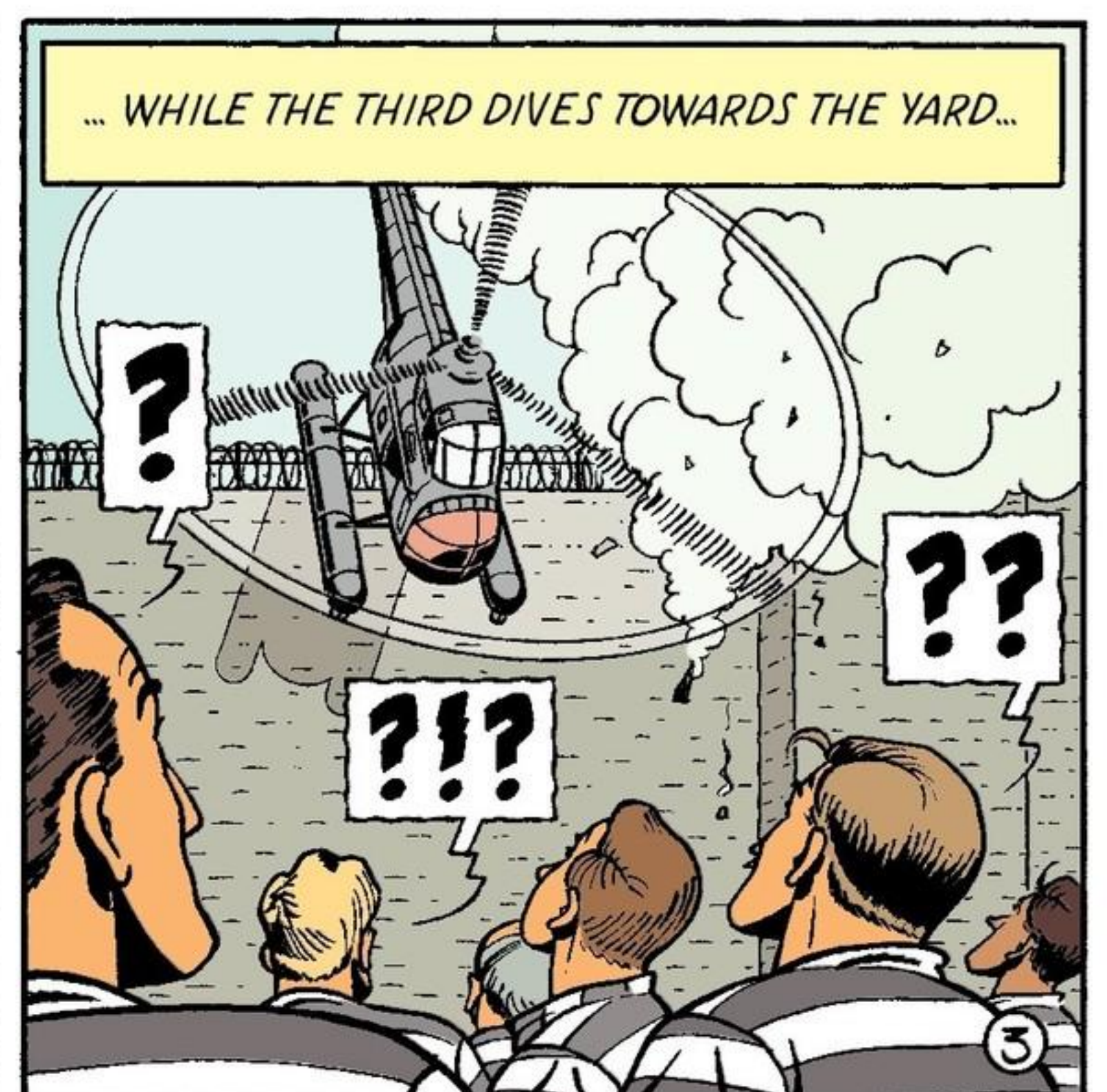
... FOR THREE COMPLETELY UNMARKED, LOW-FLYING HELICOPTERS ARE APPROACHING THE PRISON.



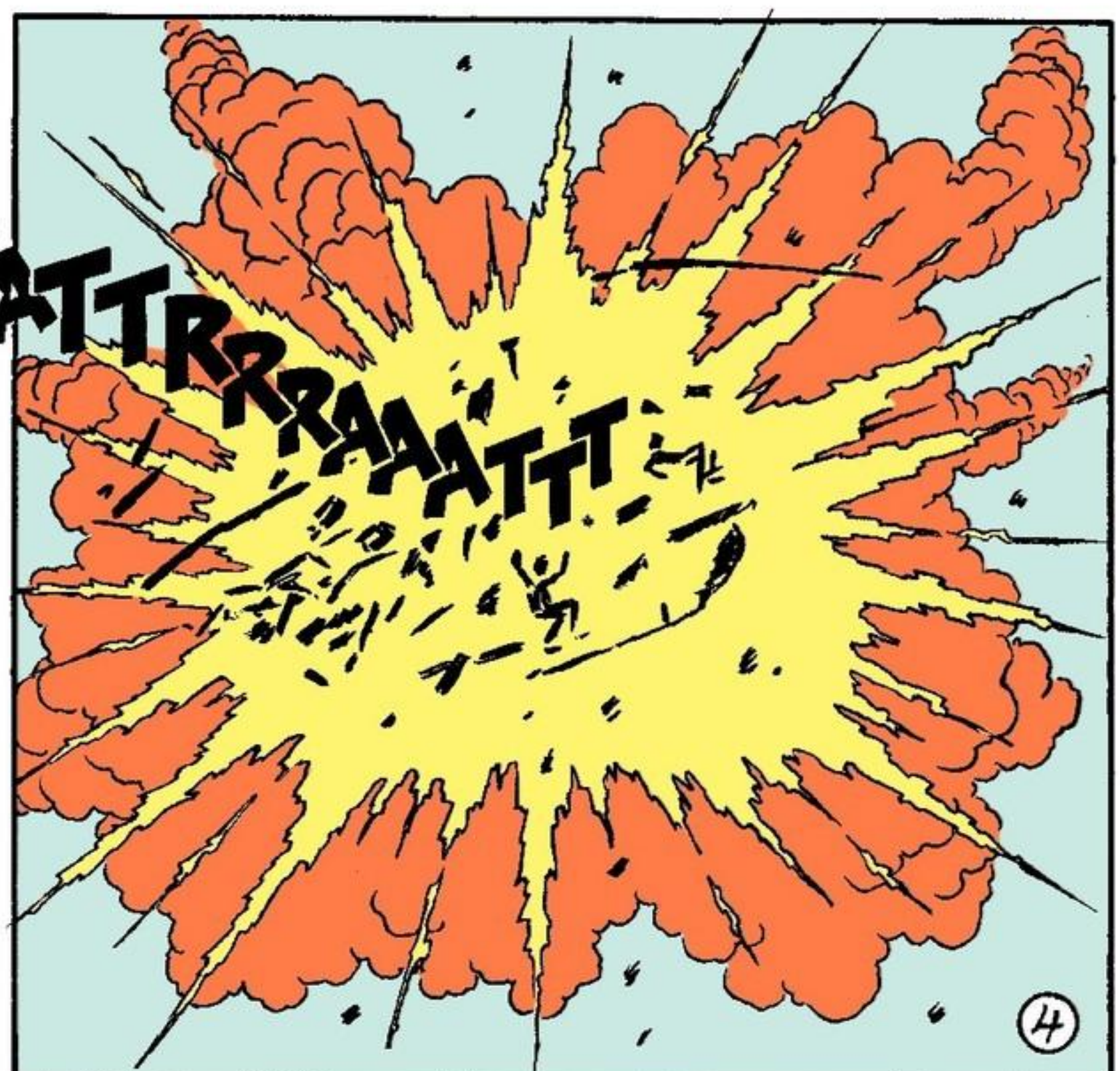
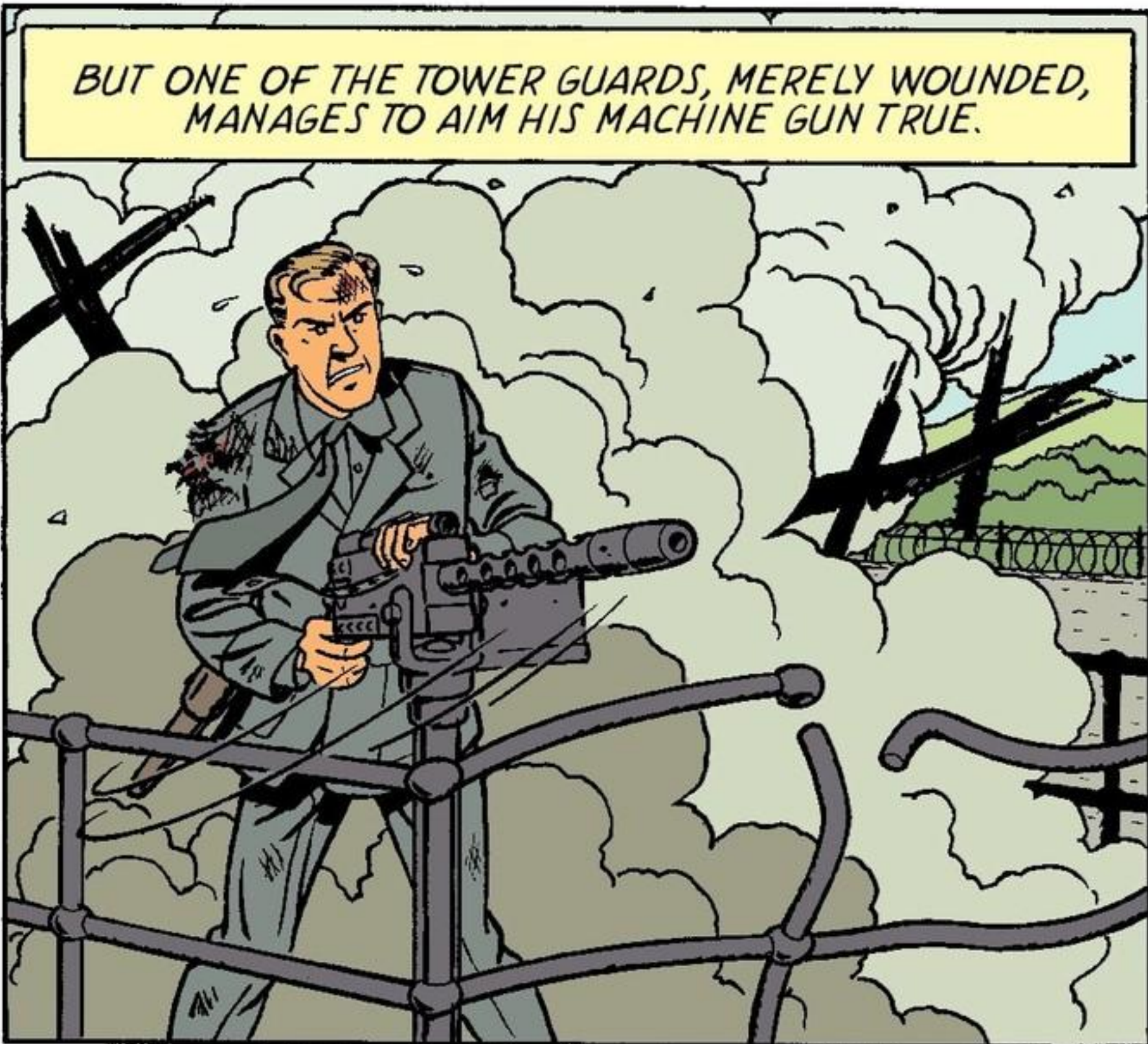
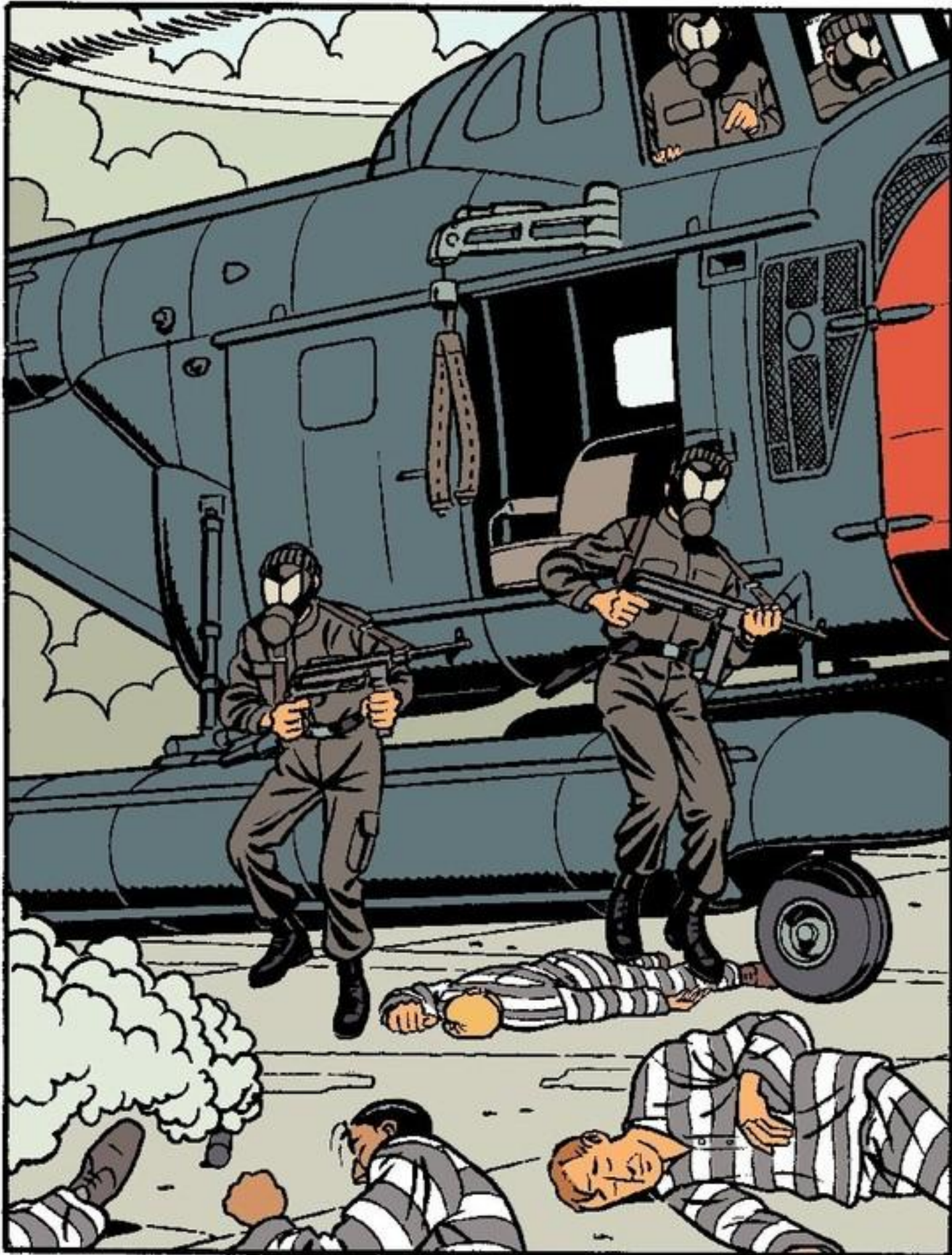
BEFORE THE GUARDS HAVE A CHANCE TO REACT, TWO OF THE AIRCRAFT OPEN FIRE ON THE GUARD TOWERS...



... WHILE THE THIRD DIVES TOWARDS THE YARD...



*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.





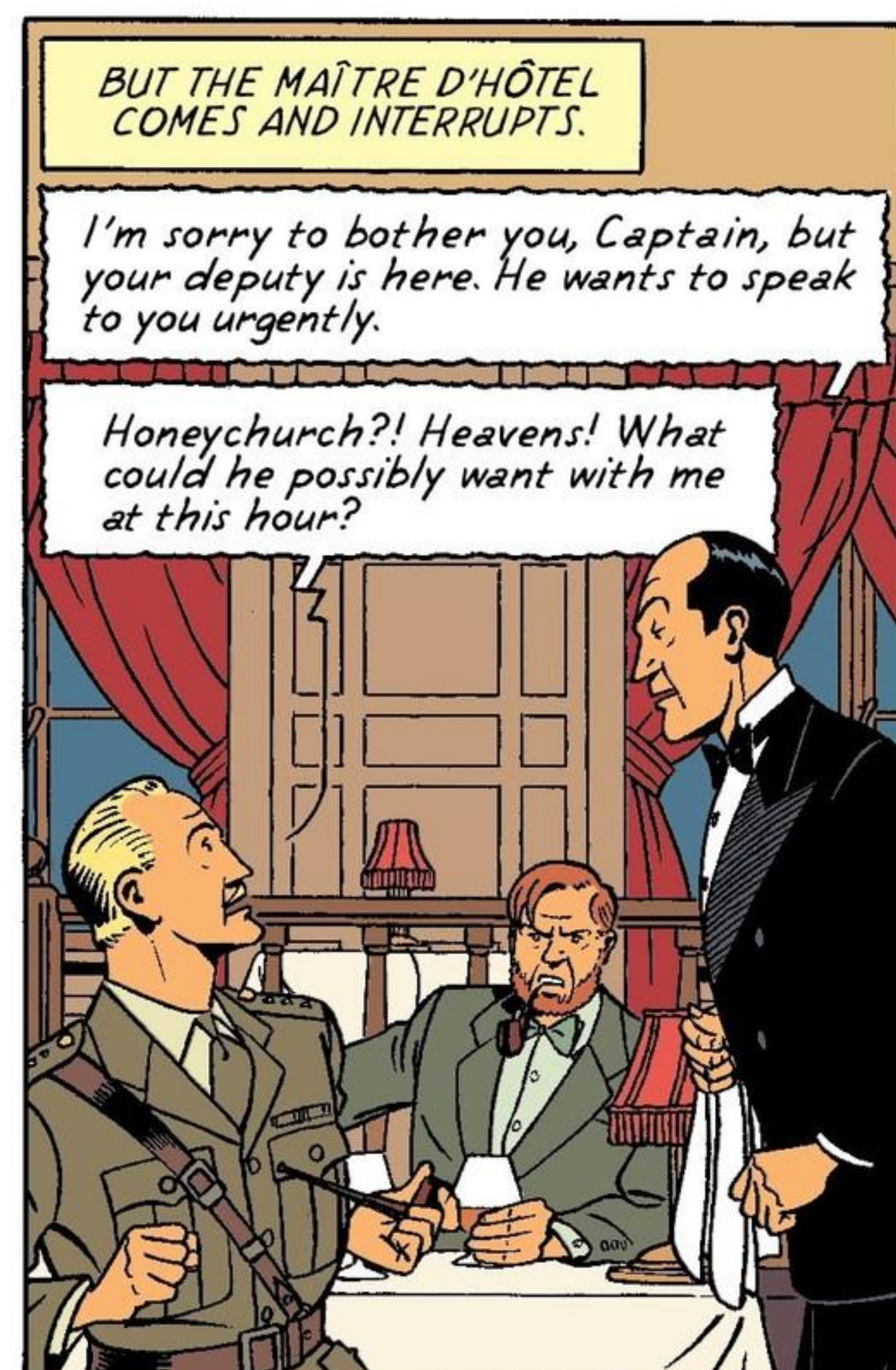
THE EVENING OF THAT SAME DAY, IN LONDON, TWO OLD FRIENDS ARE FINISHING THEIR DINNER AT THE CENTAUR CLUB IN PICCADILLY.

I look forward to this two-week holiday we're going to spend in the Lake District, my dear Francis.



Not as much as I, Philip. I can't even remember the last time I was able to take a day off.

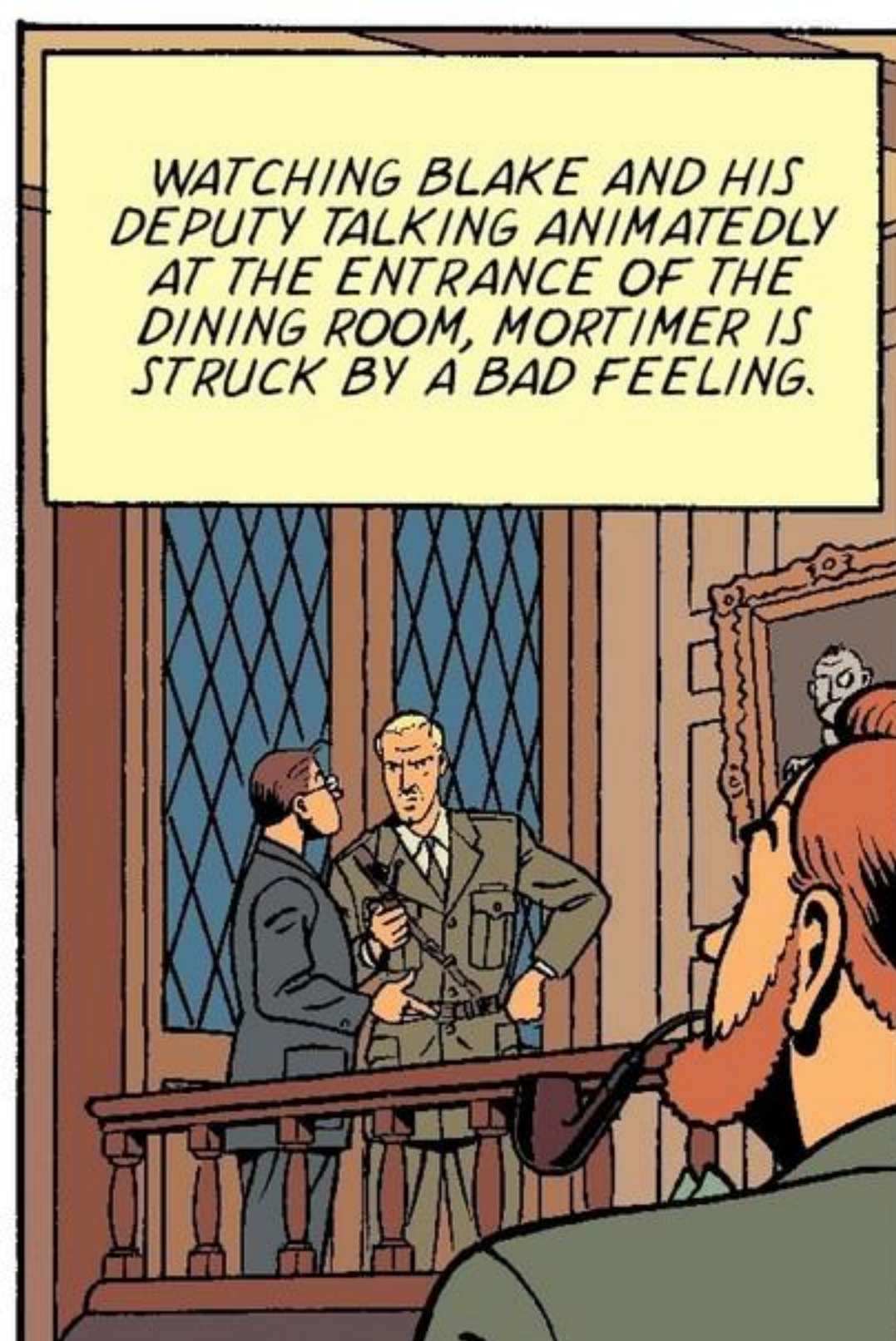
I know a lovely inn near Windermere that will help you forget your cares at the M15, old chap. Bottoms up!



BUT THE MAÎTRE D'HÔTEL COMES AND INTERRUPTS.

I'm sorry to bother you, Captain, but your deputy is here. He wants to speak to you urgently.

Honeychurch?! Heavens! What could he possibly want with me at this hour?



WATCHING BLAKE AND HIS DEPUTY TALKING ANIMATEDLY AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE DINING ROOM, MORTIMER IS STRUCK BY A BAD FEELING.



AND, INDEED, WHEN THE CAPTAIN COMES BACK TO THEIR TABLE, HIS BROW IS FURROWED WITH WORRY.

I'm afraid I have to postpone my holidays yet again, old boy. Come on—let's go home.



What's going on, Francis? Has another "Yellow M" stolen the crown jewels again?

It's almost worse than that...



Olrik escaped from Jacksonville Penitentiary.

AND BLAKE RECAPS IN A FEW WORDS WHAT HONEYCHURCH HAS JUST TOLD HIM.



Good heavens! That blasted villain still has pretty powerful allies, then?

Apparently so. Which is why the FBI is asking me to come help them find him as quickly as possible.



I will be on a plane to Washington tomorrow morning.

I could come with you. I know that devil as well as you.



No, Philip. This is a police operation. Despite the help you've given it before*, the Bureau won't let a civilian get involved in the investigation.



I'm afraid you'll have to go catch trout in the Lake District without me, old fellow.

Not the happiest of prospects, Francis.

*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

THE NEXT MORNING, HIS MOOD DECIDEDLY MOROSE AFTER TAKING THE CAPTAIN TO THE AIRPORT, MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF ALONE IN HIS 99 PARK LANE FLAT, DEEP IN THE STUDY OF A MAP OF THE WORLD.

Where the devil should I spend these two weeks' holidays?...

To India, maybe, and my childhood memories? No. Without Blake, there would be something missing. Besides, I'm not exactly one for nostalgia.

BUT THE DOORBELL PULLS HIM AWAY FROM HIS PONDERINGS.

DRRRING

?

Hello, Mrs Benson, how are you?

Very good, thank you. A postman just brought this letter especially for you, Professor.

Who on Earth could be writing me from Greece? I don't know anyone there. Thank you, Mrs Benson.

WITH THE LANDLADY GONE, MORTIMER QUICKLY OPENS THE MISSIVE.

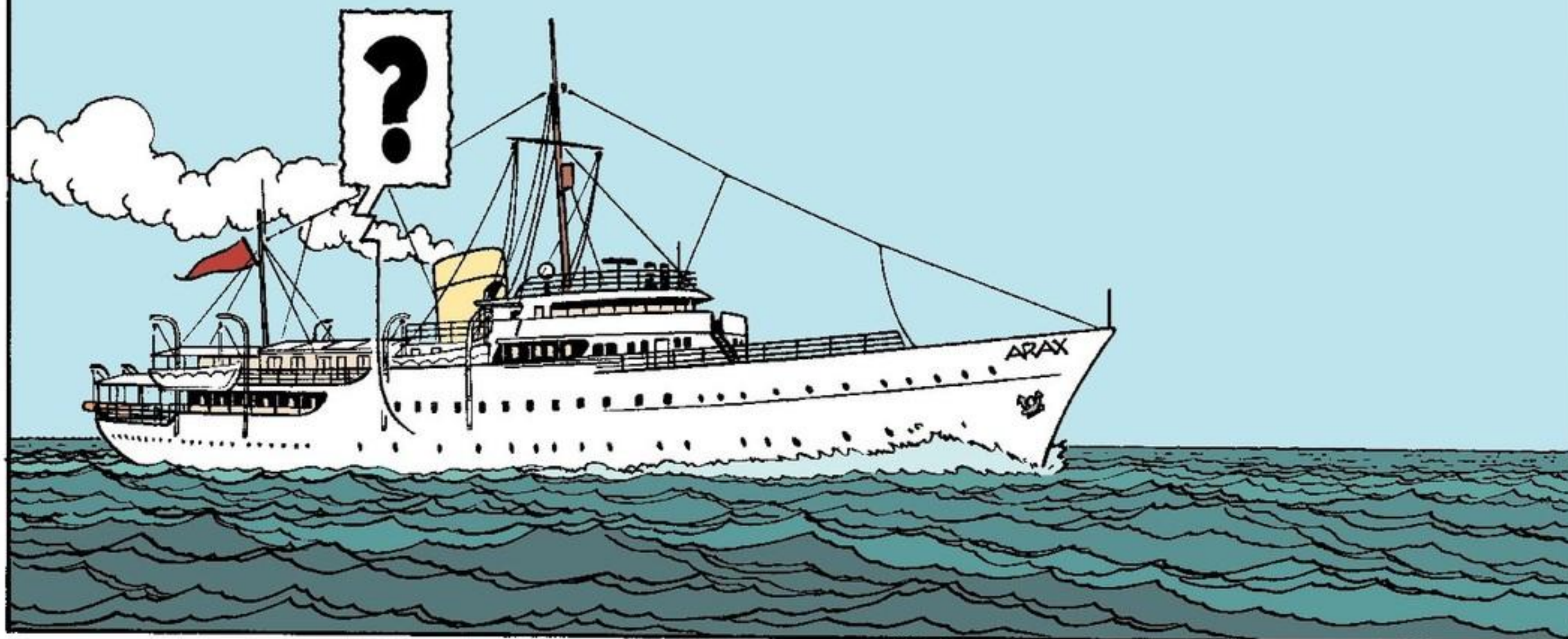
"Dear Professor Mortimer, your reputation as an amateur archaeologist has travelled far and wide. Moreover, you come very highly recommended by a mutual friend..."

... Professor Ahmed Rassim Bey, Head Curator of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo. The purpose of this letter is to ask you if you'd agree to help me solve an incredible mystery, which, I'm sure, you will find fascinating.

Well, the timing of this invitation is excellent. Let's see... This ticket is for next Thursday, which should give me enough time to organise things and procure a visa.

You'll find enclosed a plane ticket to Athens, etc, etc... Signed: Georgios Markopoulos, Head Curator of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens."

A FEW DAYS LATER, SEVERAL THOUSAND MILES FROM LONDON...



... OLRIK COMES TO AFTER A LONG TIME UNCONSCIOUS.

What the?...



What happened? Those helicopters came, and then... nothing!...



AFTER REMOVING THE I.V. NEEDLE FROM HIS ARM, THE "COLONEL" MAKES HIS STAGGERING WAY TOWARDS THE PORTHOLE OF THE CABIN IN WHICH HE HAS JUST AWAKENED.



HOWEVER, AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE, IT'S NOTHING BUT THE OCEAN'S GREY WAVES.



Did you sleep well, Colonel?



Jack?!?

There's a bathroom next door, and you'll find clothes in your size in the cupboard.

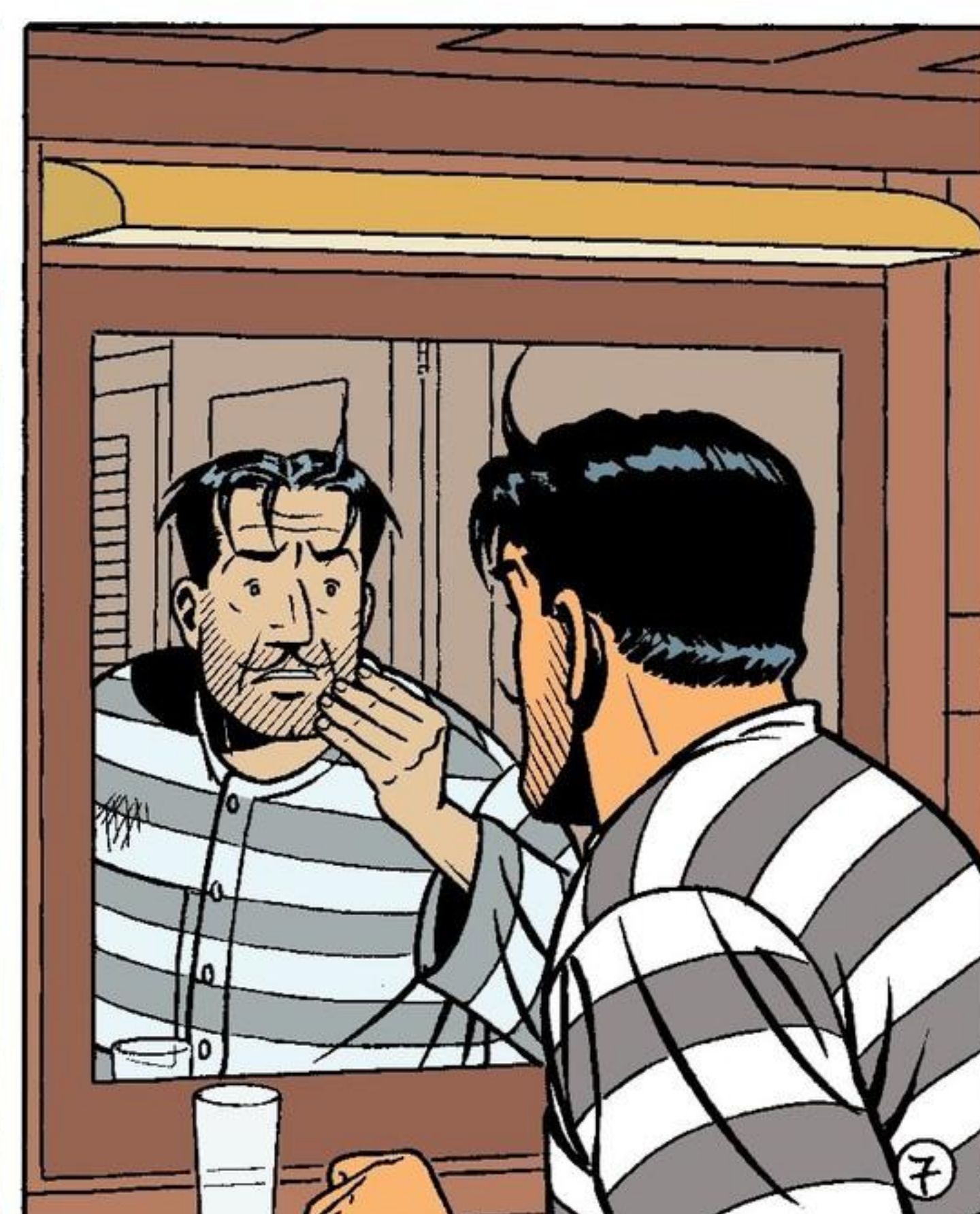


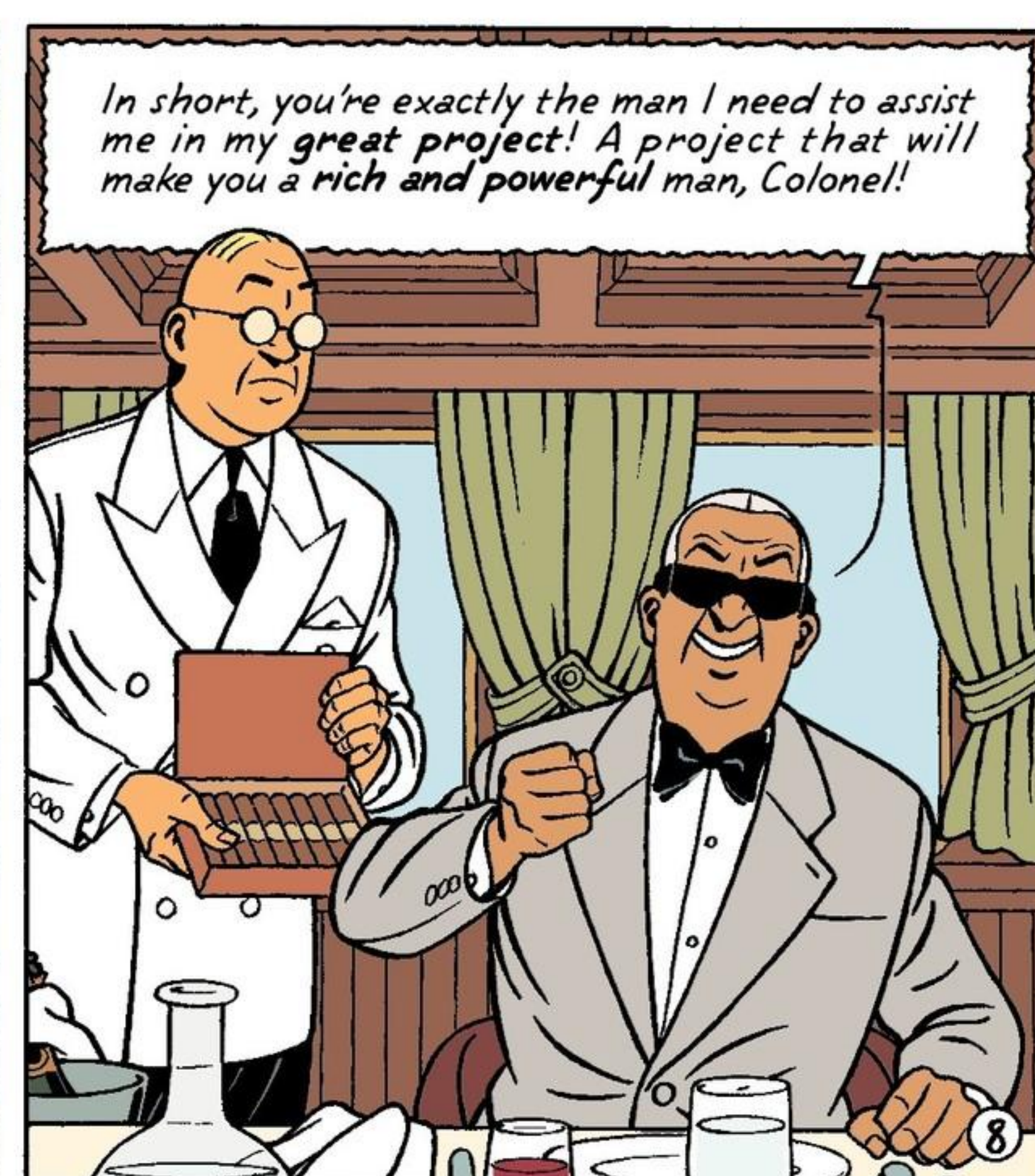
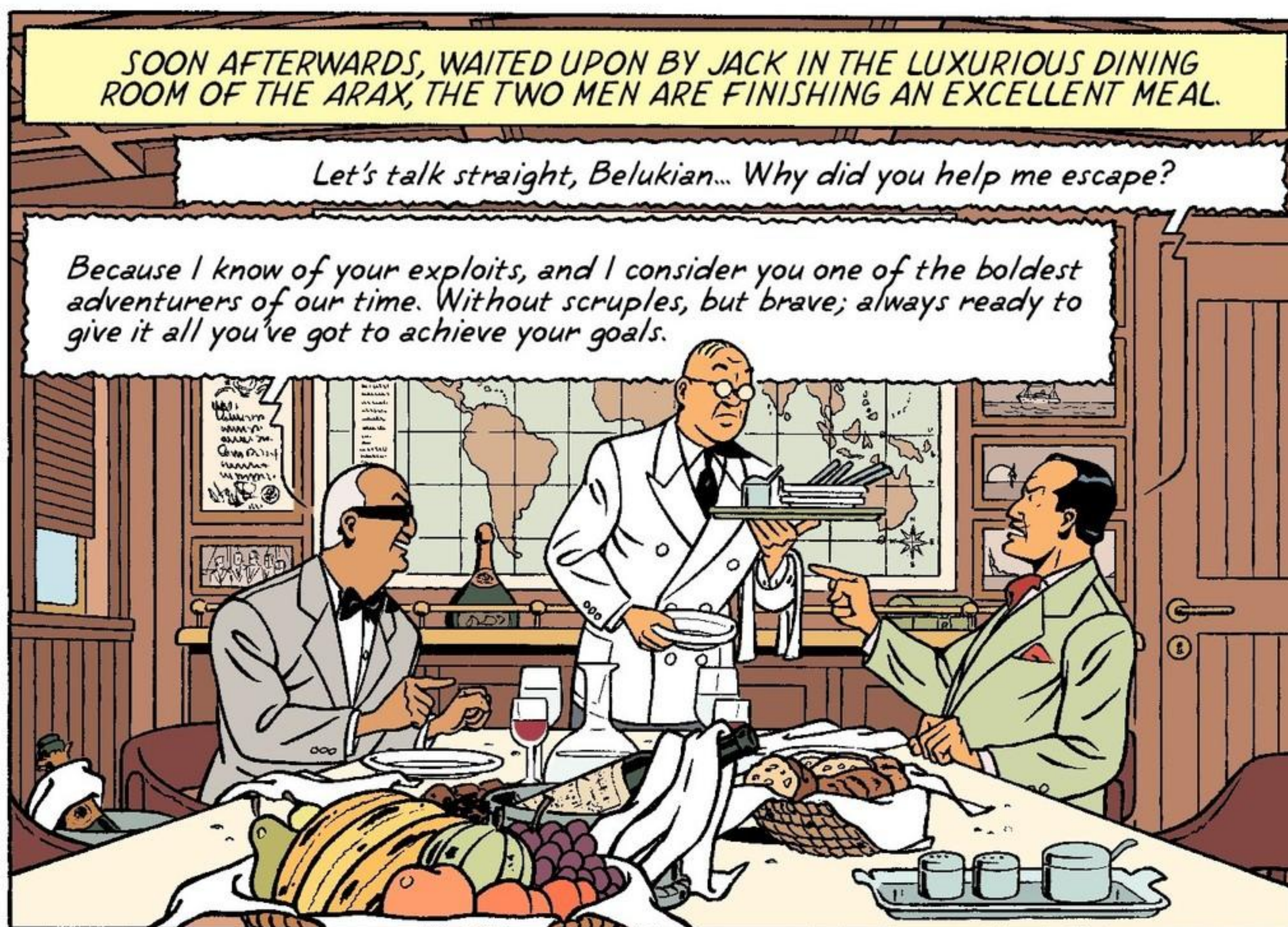
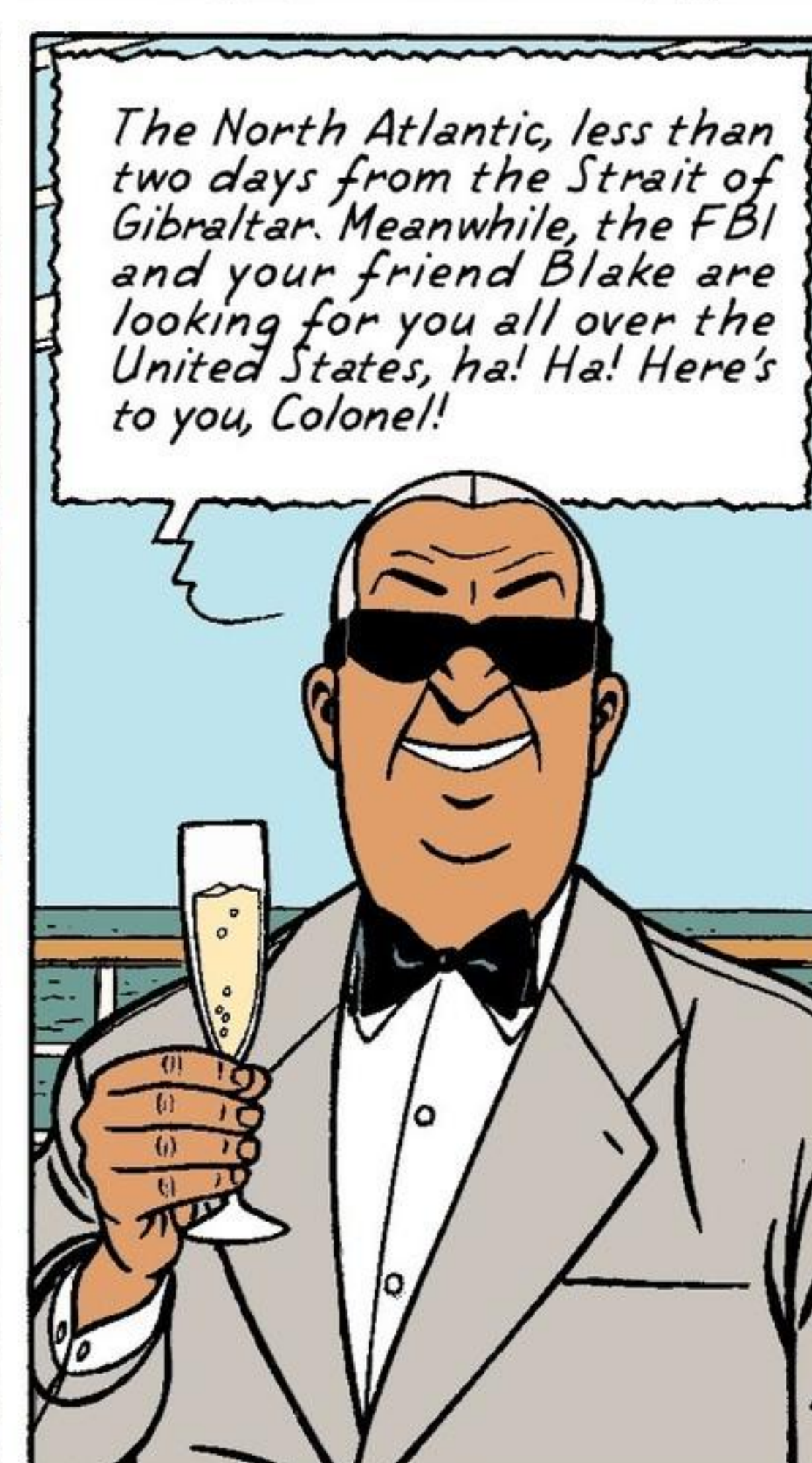
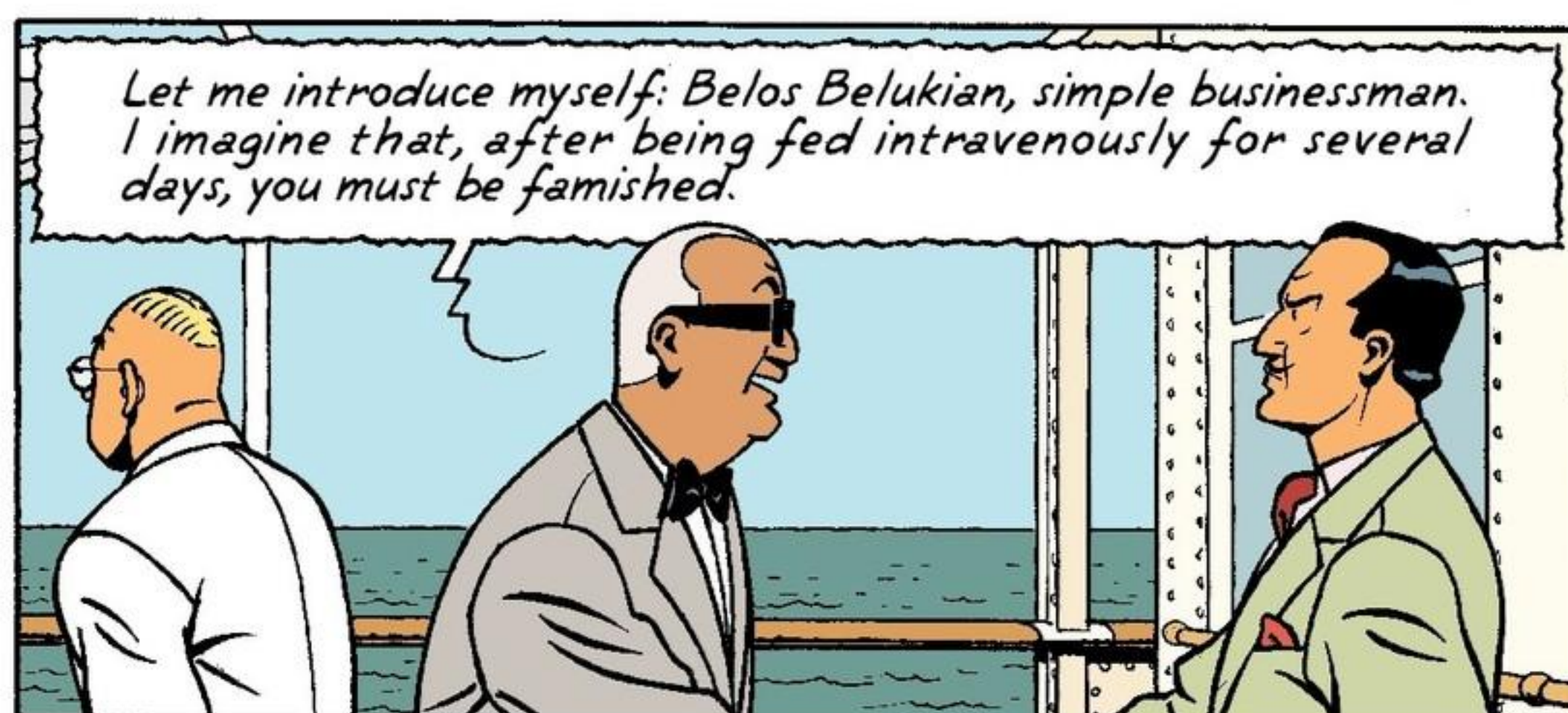
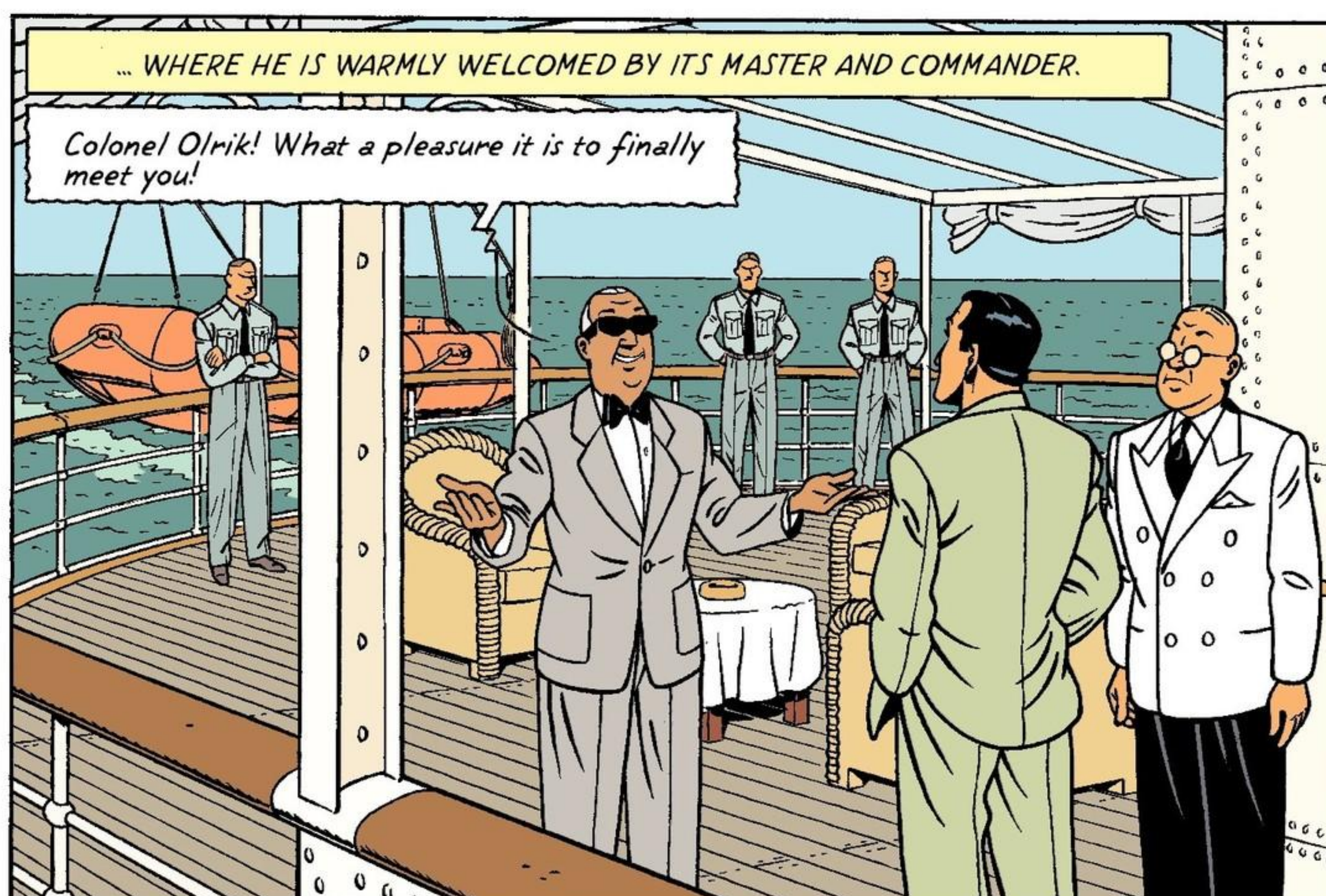
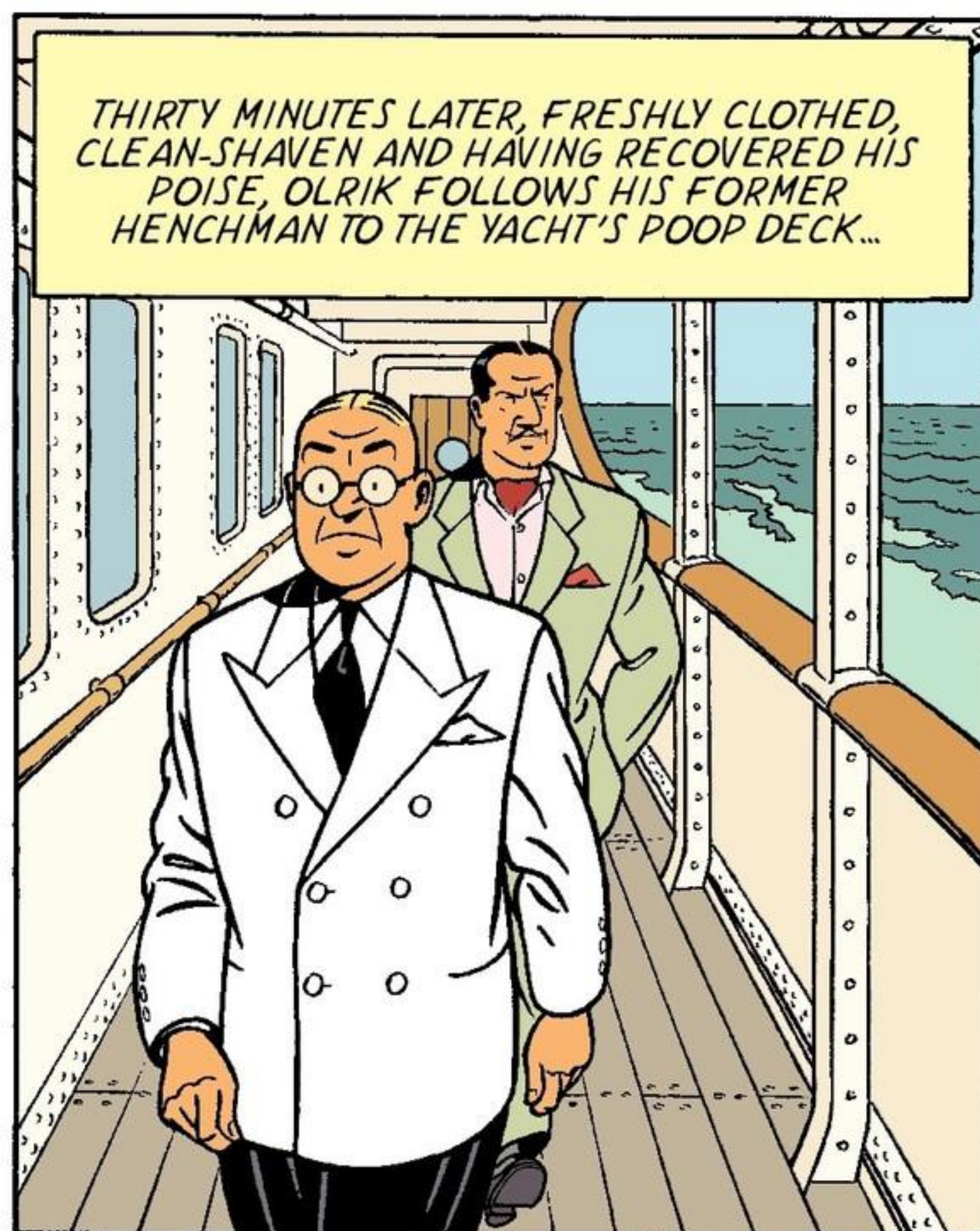
Jack, what are you doing here? Where are we?!

On the Arax, my new employer's yacht. But he'll explain everything himself.



I'll come get you in half an hour.

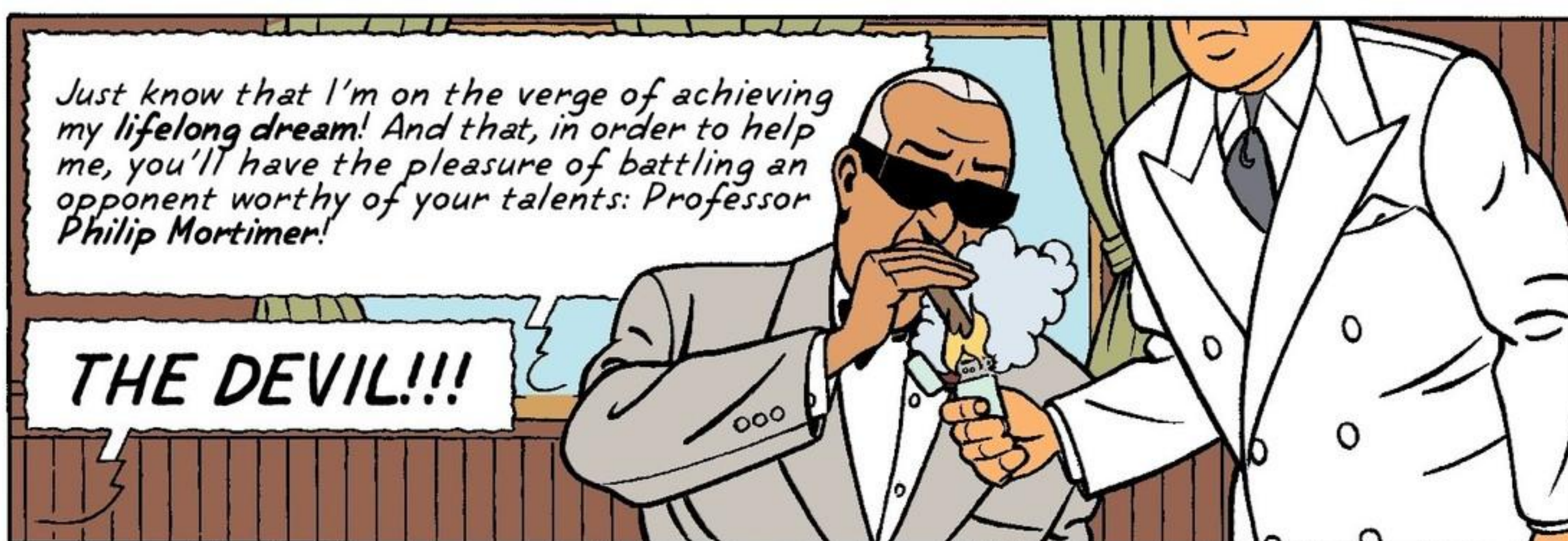






It all sounds quite attractive, my dear sir. In spite of the gratitude I owe you, though, I'd still need some details on what you expect from me.

You'll get them in due time, dear fellow.



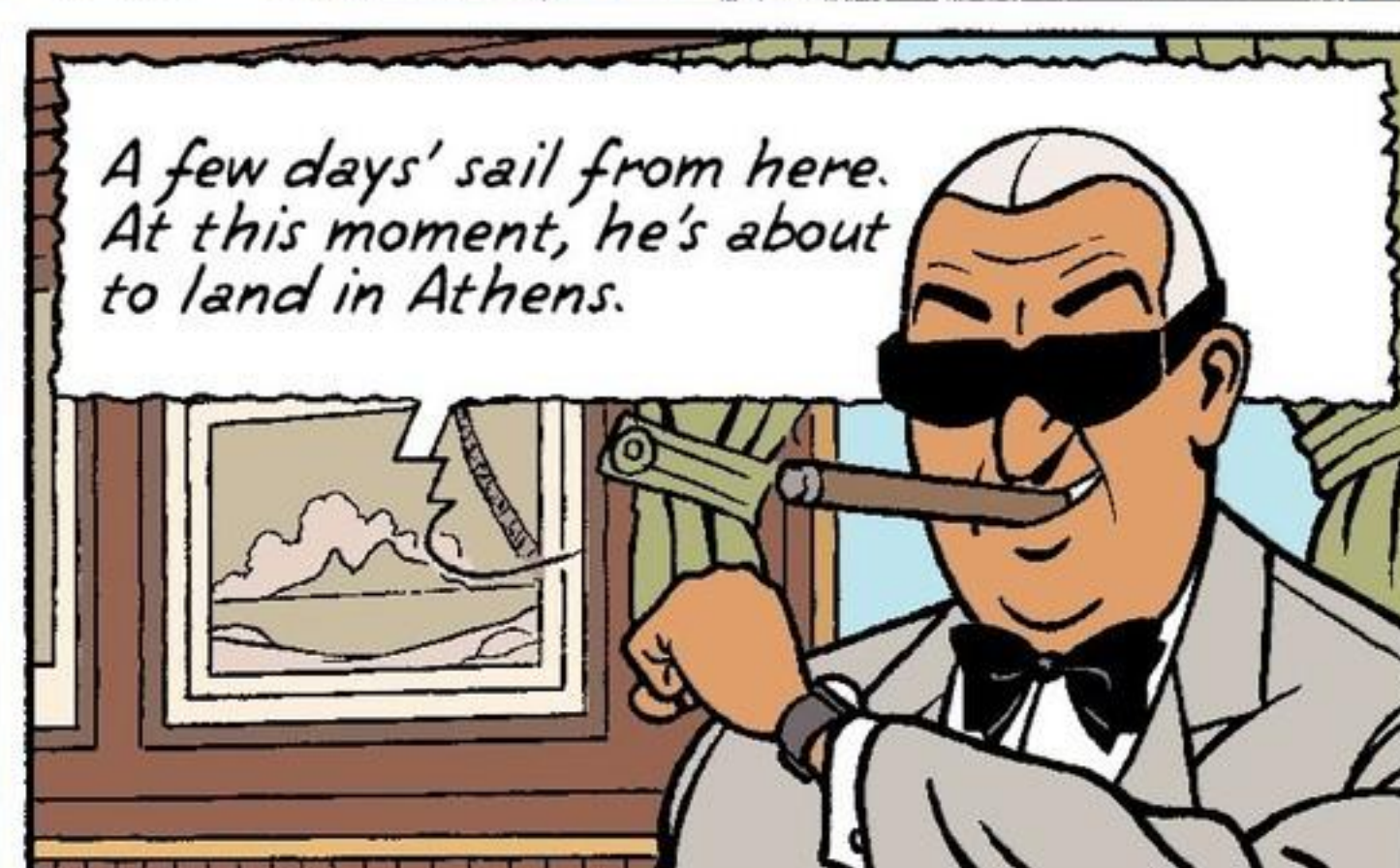
Just know that I'm on the verge of achieving my lifelong dream! And that, in order to help me, you'll have the pleasure of battling an opponent worthy of your talents: Professor Philip Mortimer!

THE DEVIL!!!

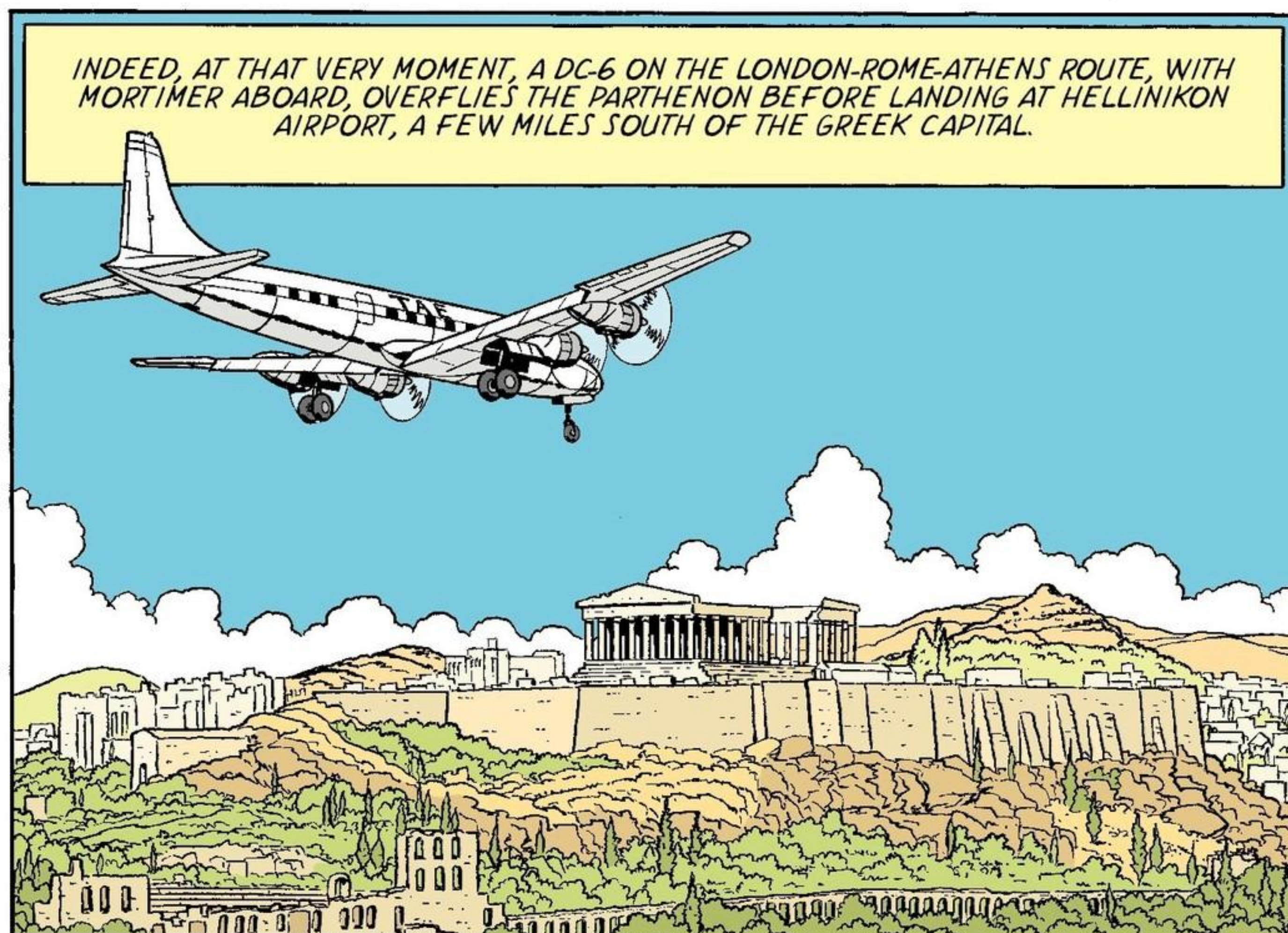


Him again! Always! This time, I'll strangle him with my own hands. Where is he?

ZZING



A few days' sail from here. At this moment, he's about to land in Athens.



INDEED, AT THAT VERY MOMENT, A DC-6 ON THE LONDON-ROME-ATHENS ROUTE, WITH MORTIMER ABOARD, OVERFLIES THE PARTHENON BEFORE LANDS AT HELLINIKON AIRPORT, A FEW MILES SOUTH OF THE GREEK CAPITAL.



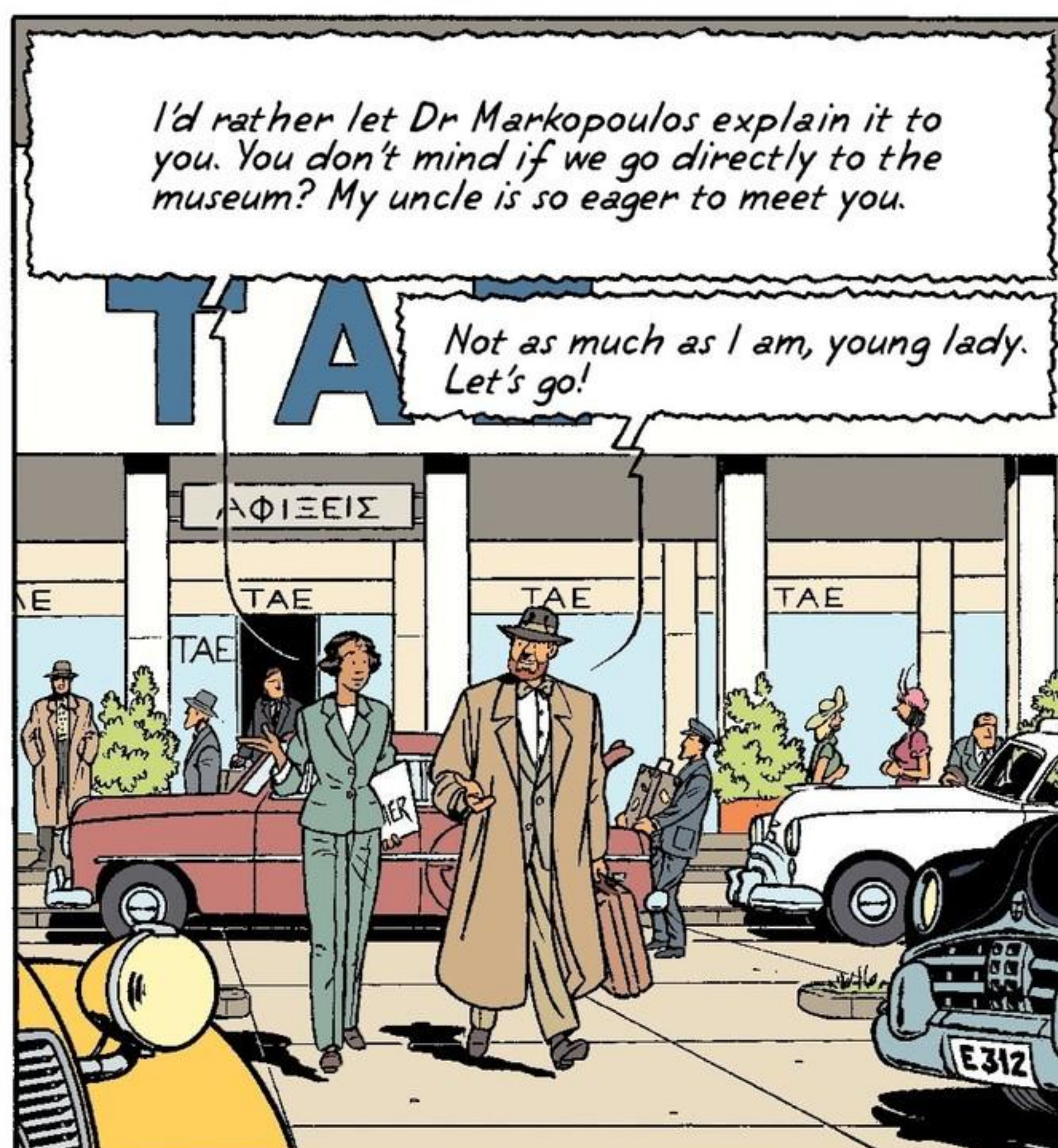
AFTER COMING THROUGH PASSPORT CONTROL AND CUSTOMS, OUR FRIEND HAS THE PLEASANT SURPRISE OF FINDING A CHARMING YOUNG WOMAN WAITING FOR HIM.

ΕΞΟΔΟΣ - EXIT



Professor Mortimer? I'm Eleni Philippides, niece and assistant of Dr Markopoulos.

Charmed. Am I finally going to know what exactly is the mystery that brought me here?



I'd rather let Dr Markopoulos explain it to you. You don't mind if we go directly to the museum? My uncle is so eager to meet you.

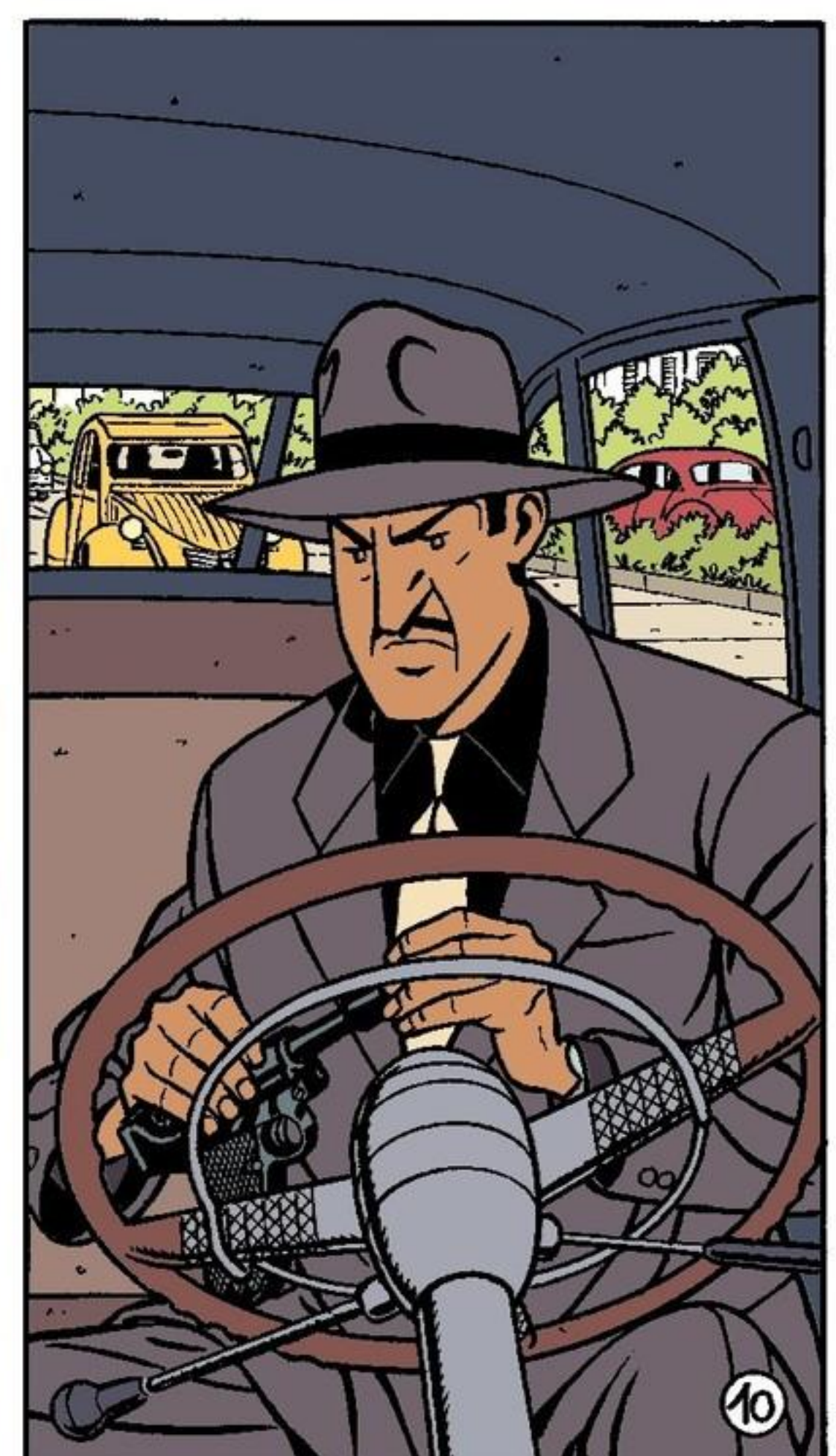
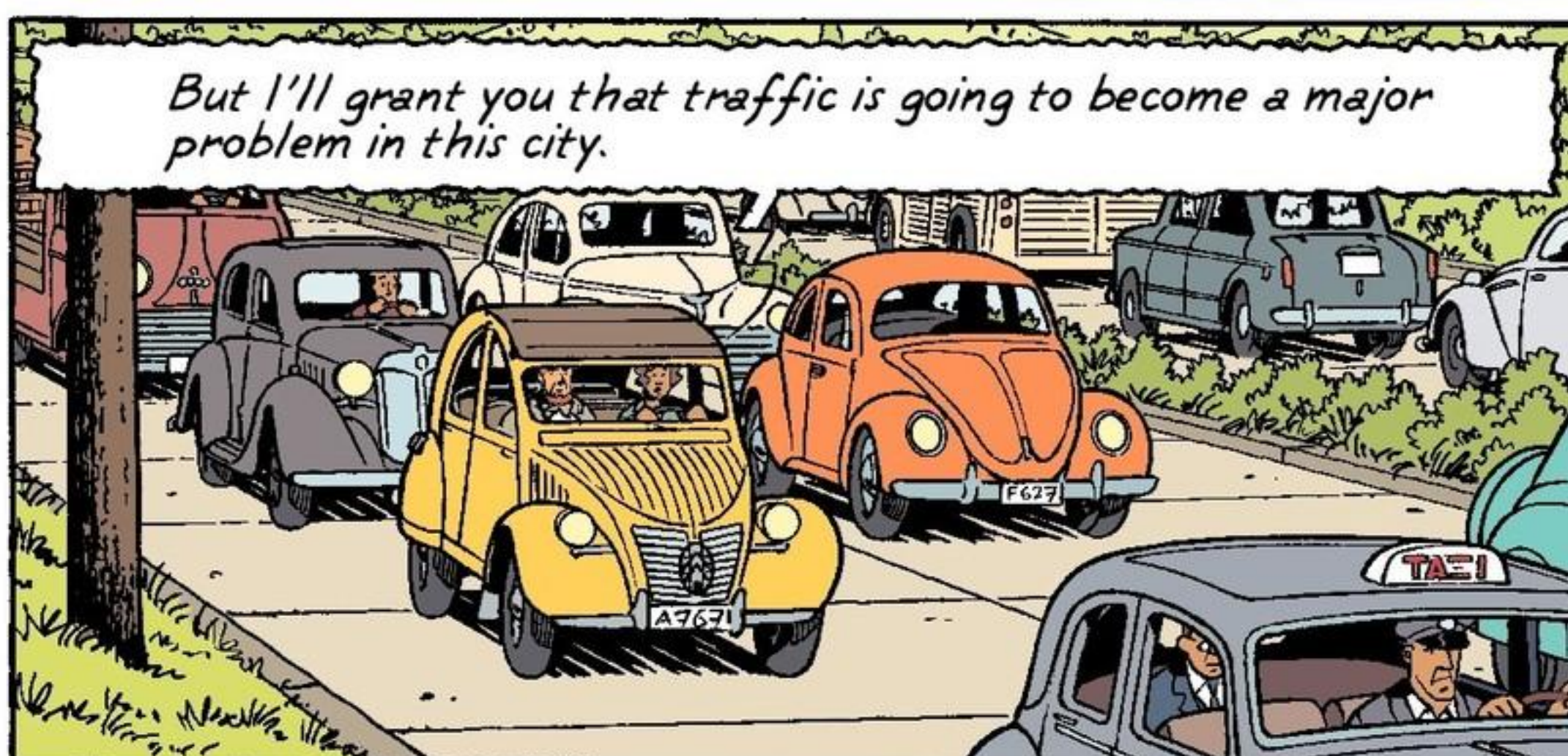
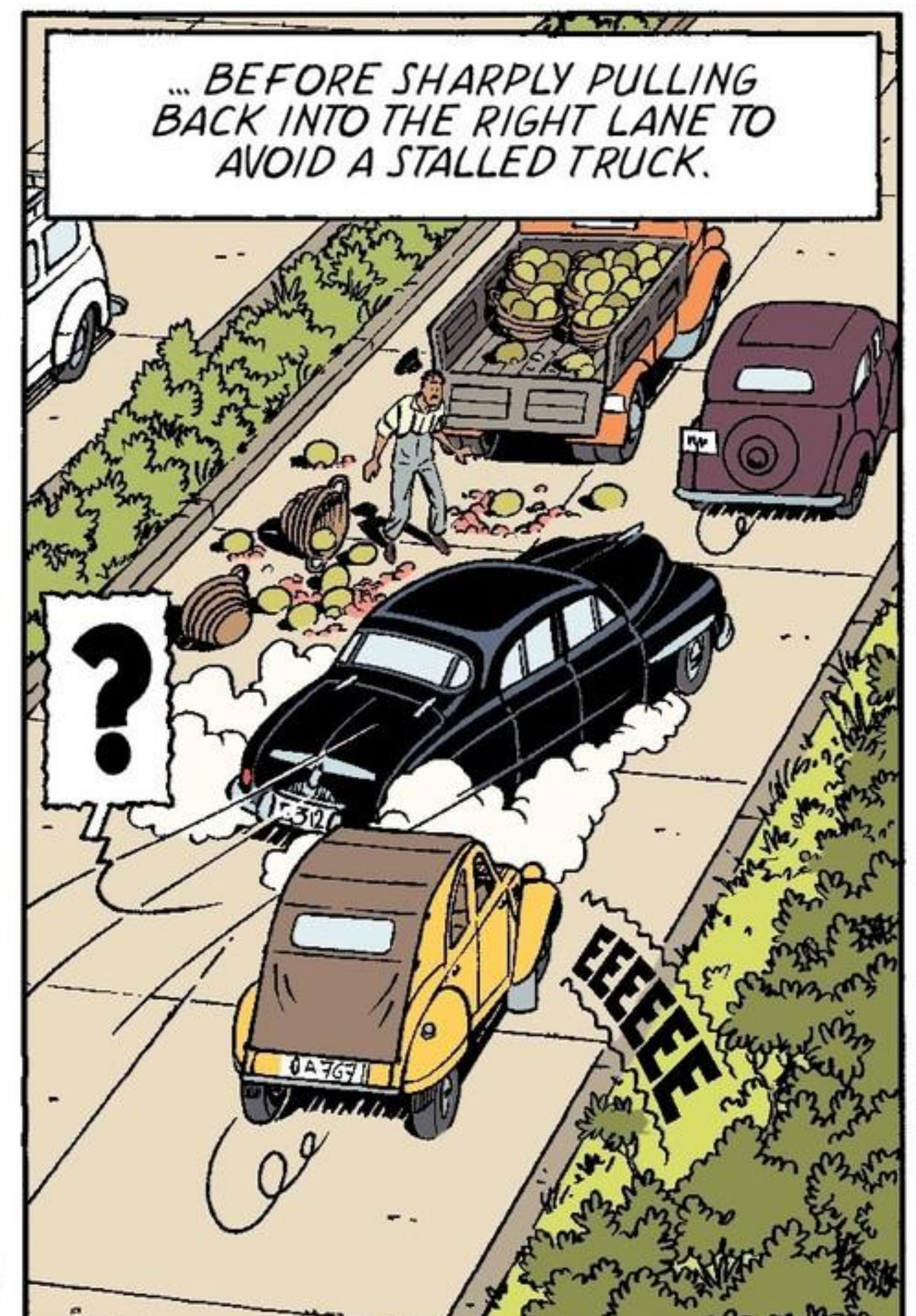
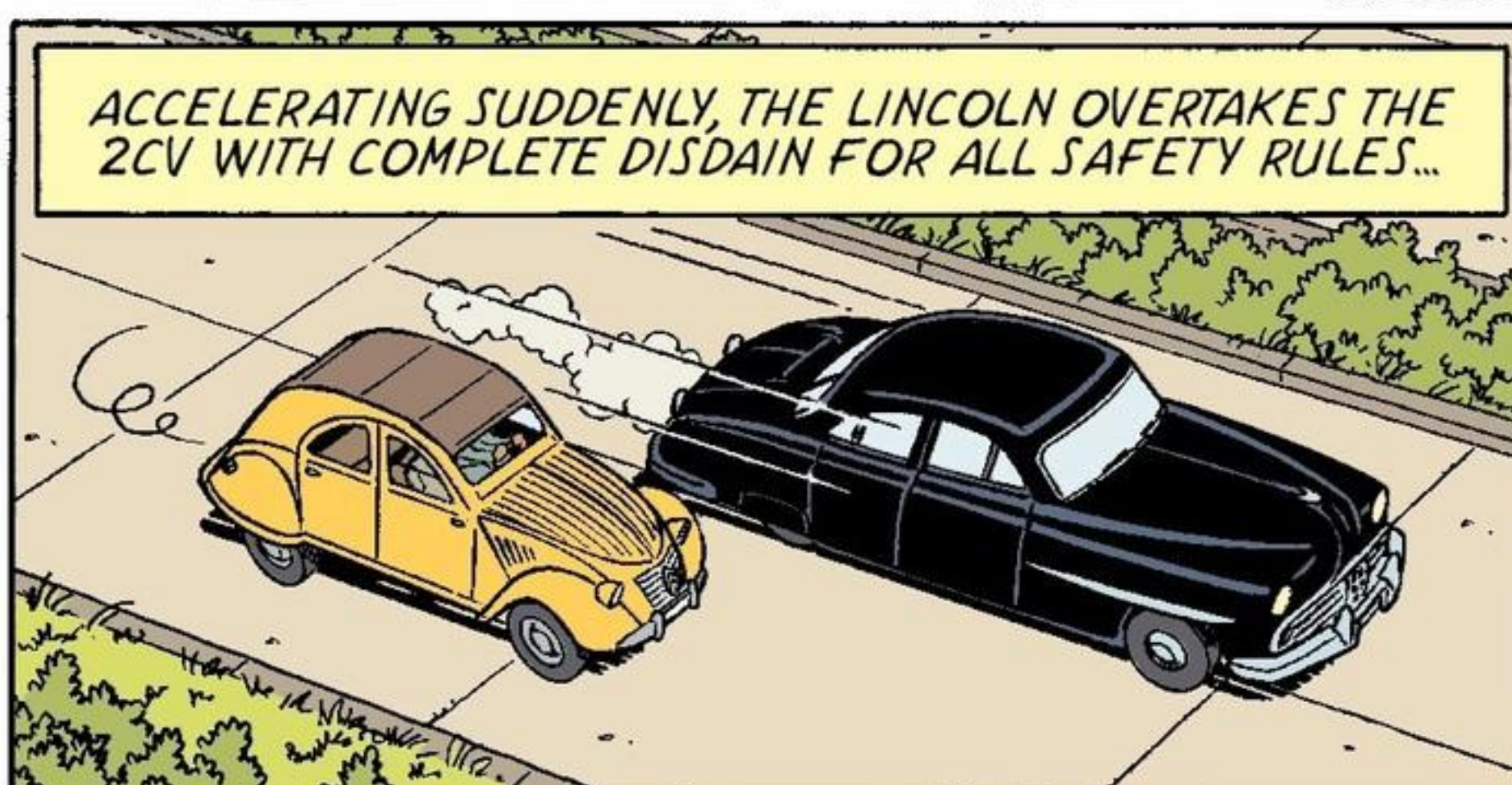
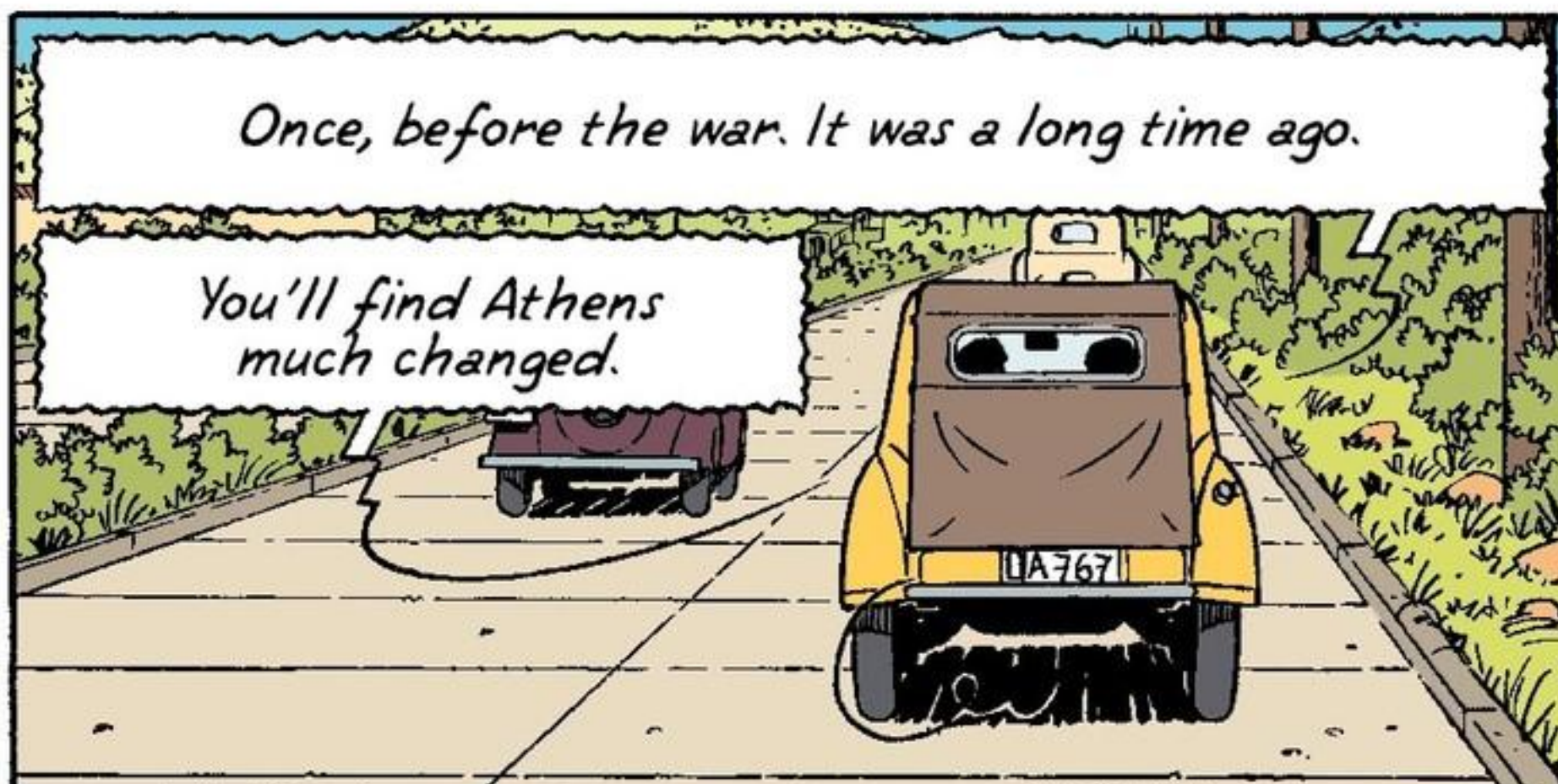
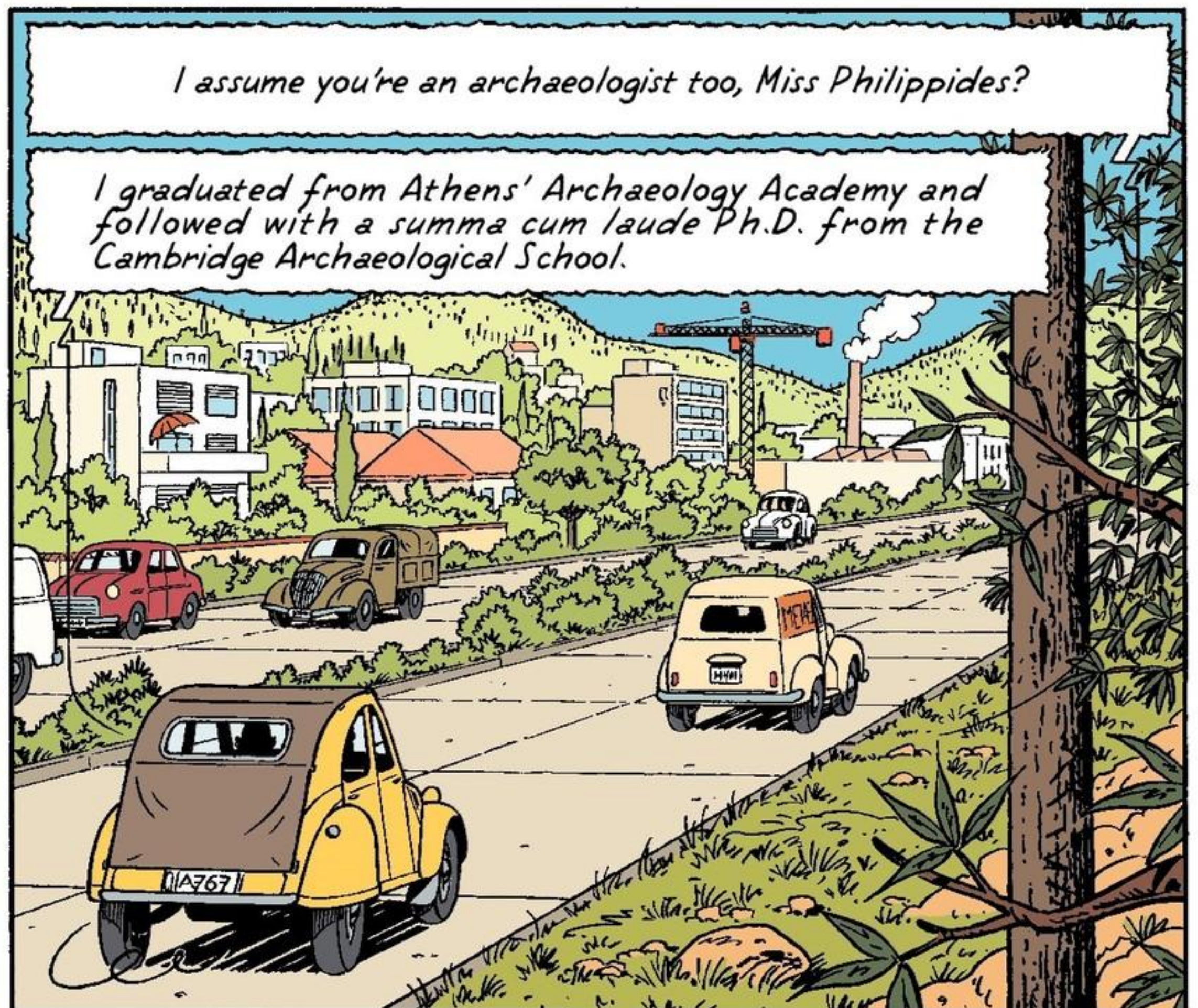
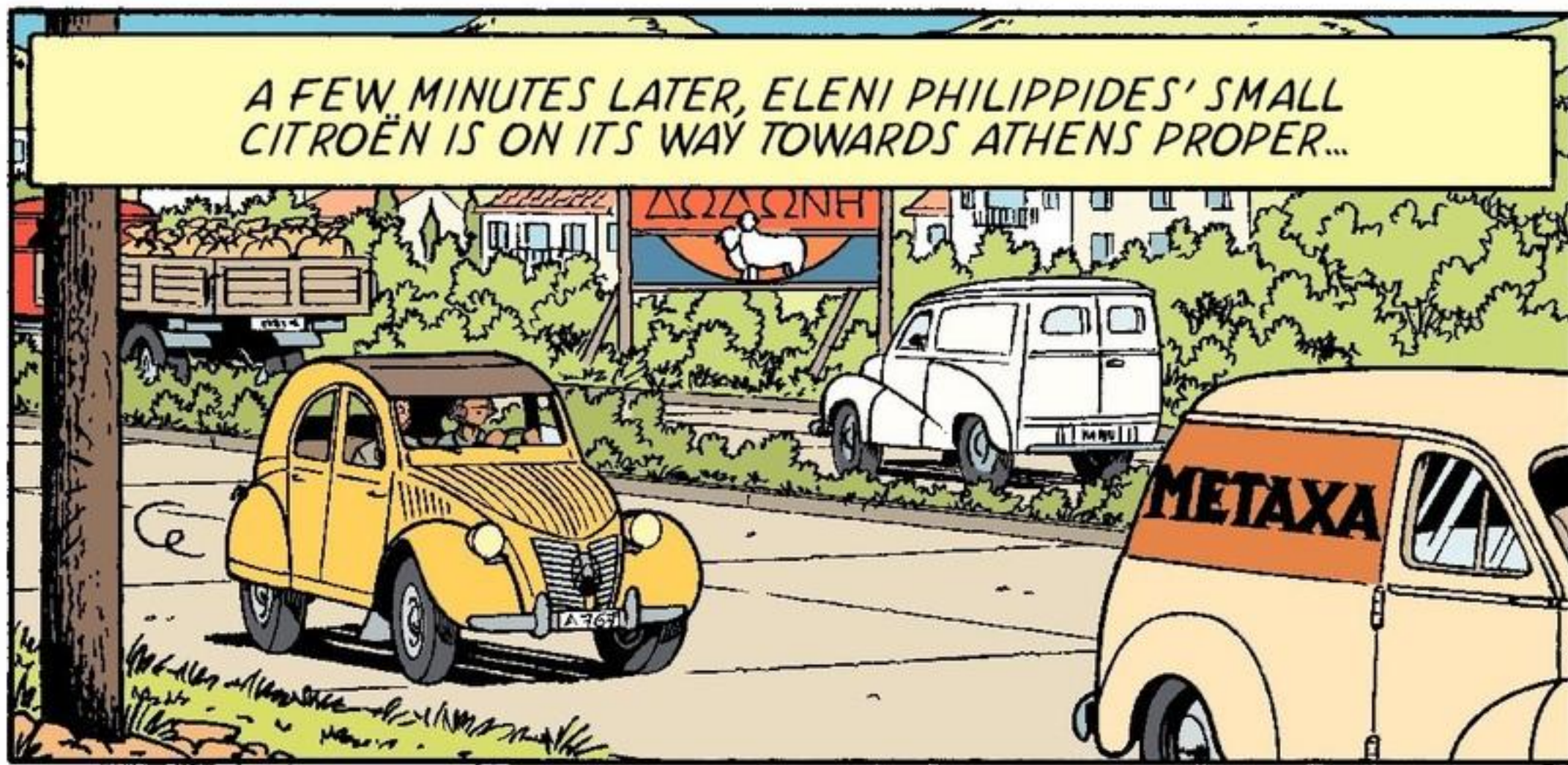
Not as much as I am, young lady. Let's go!

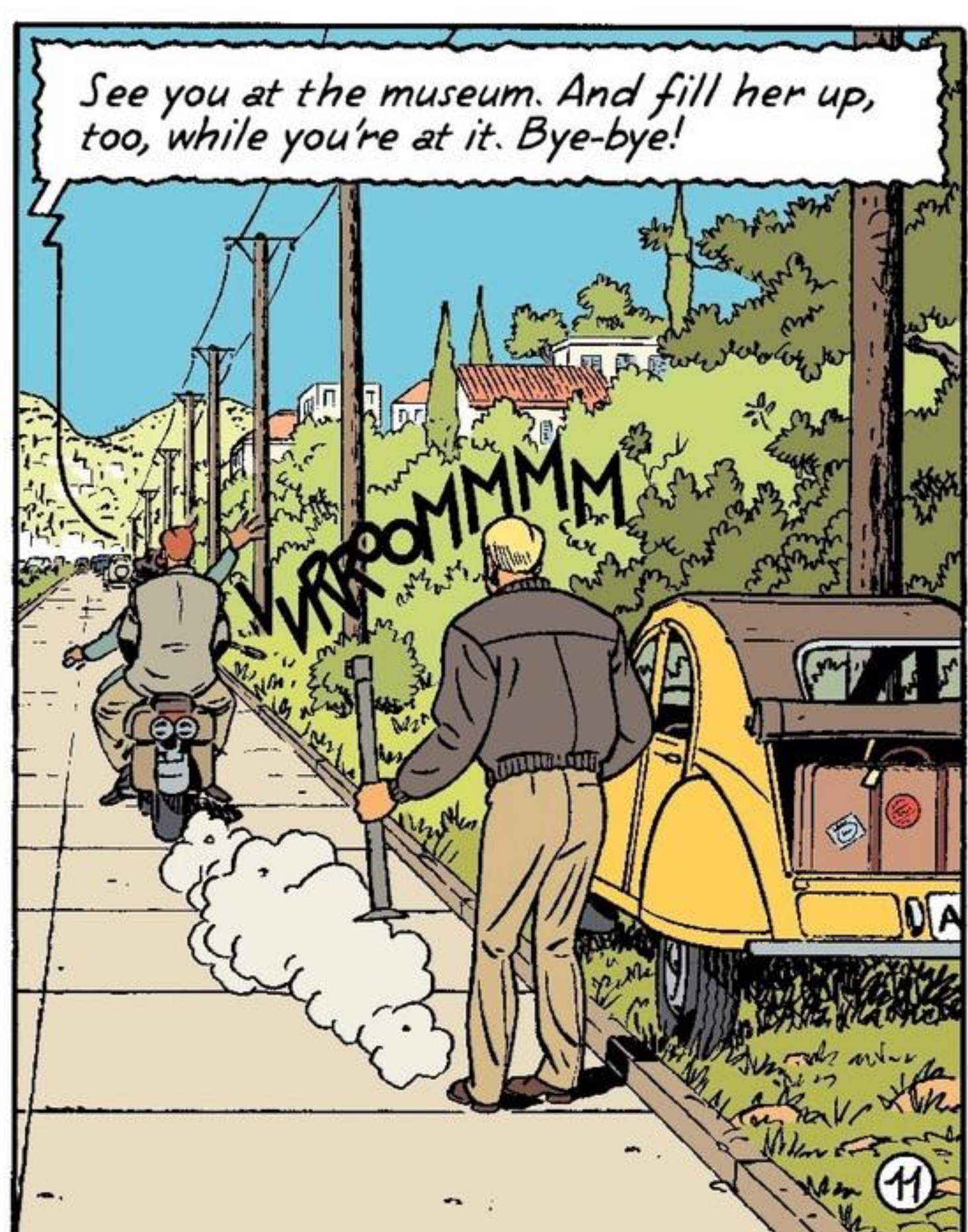
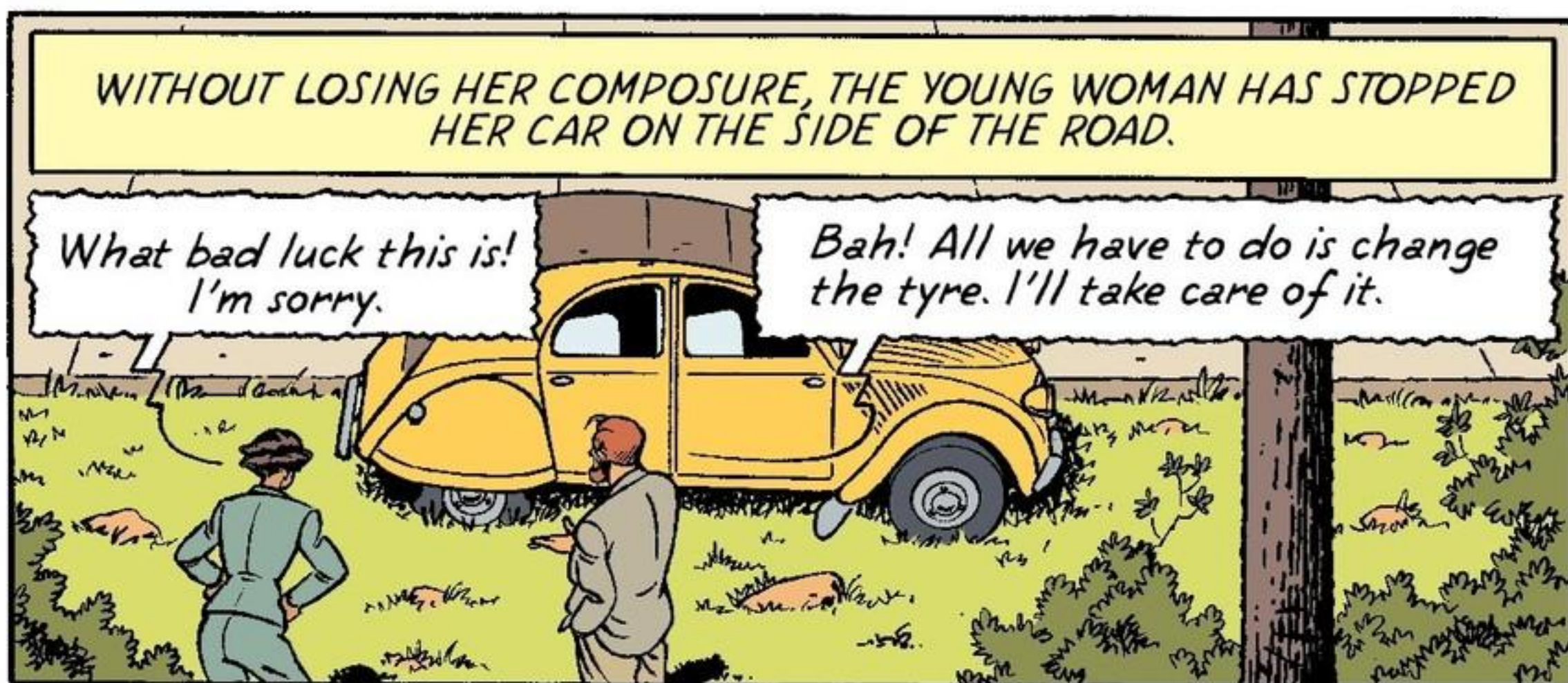
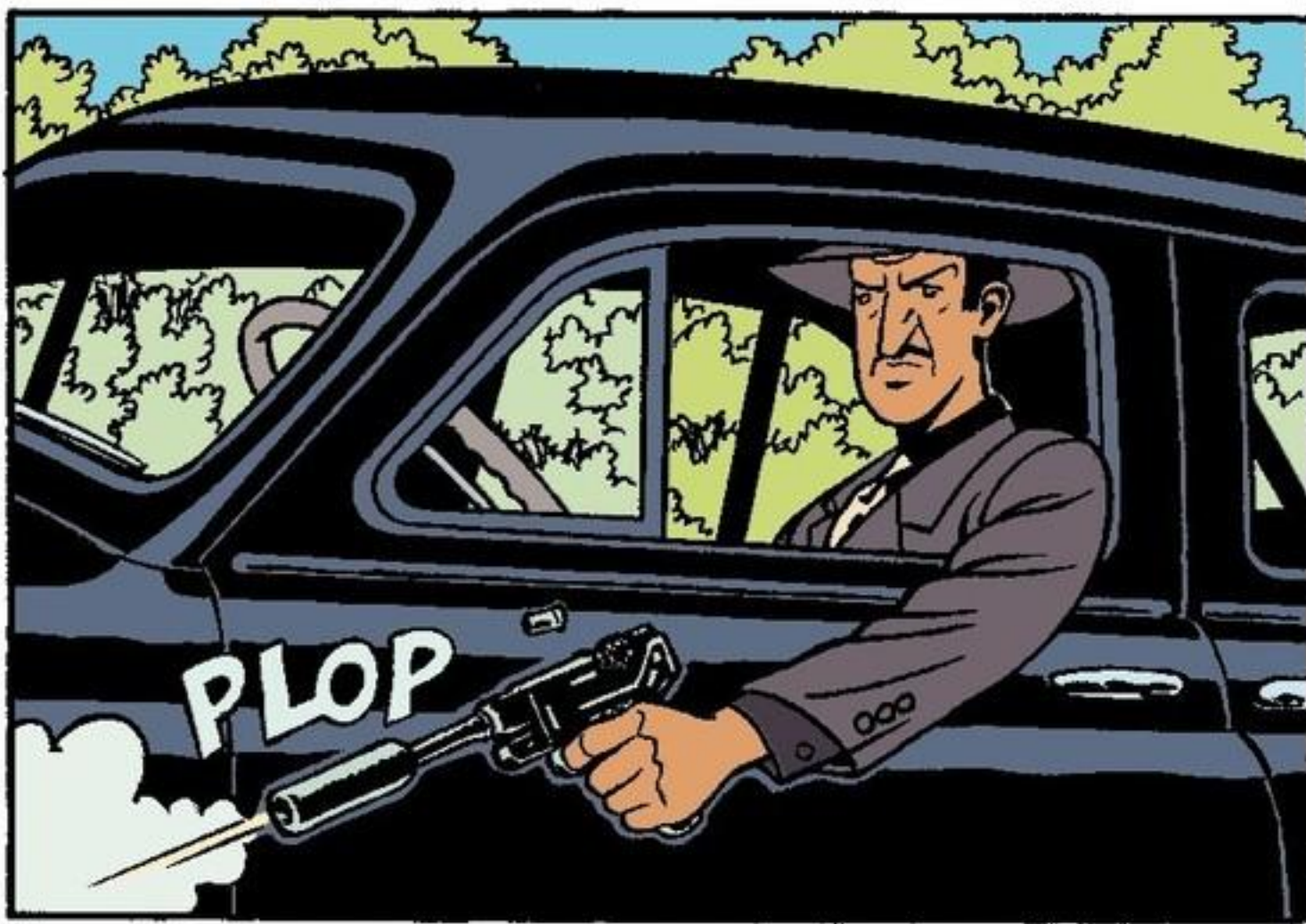


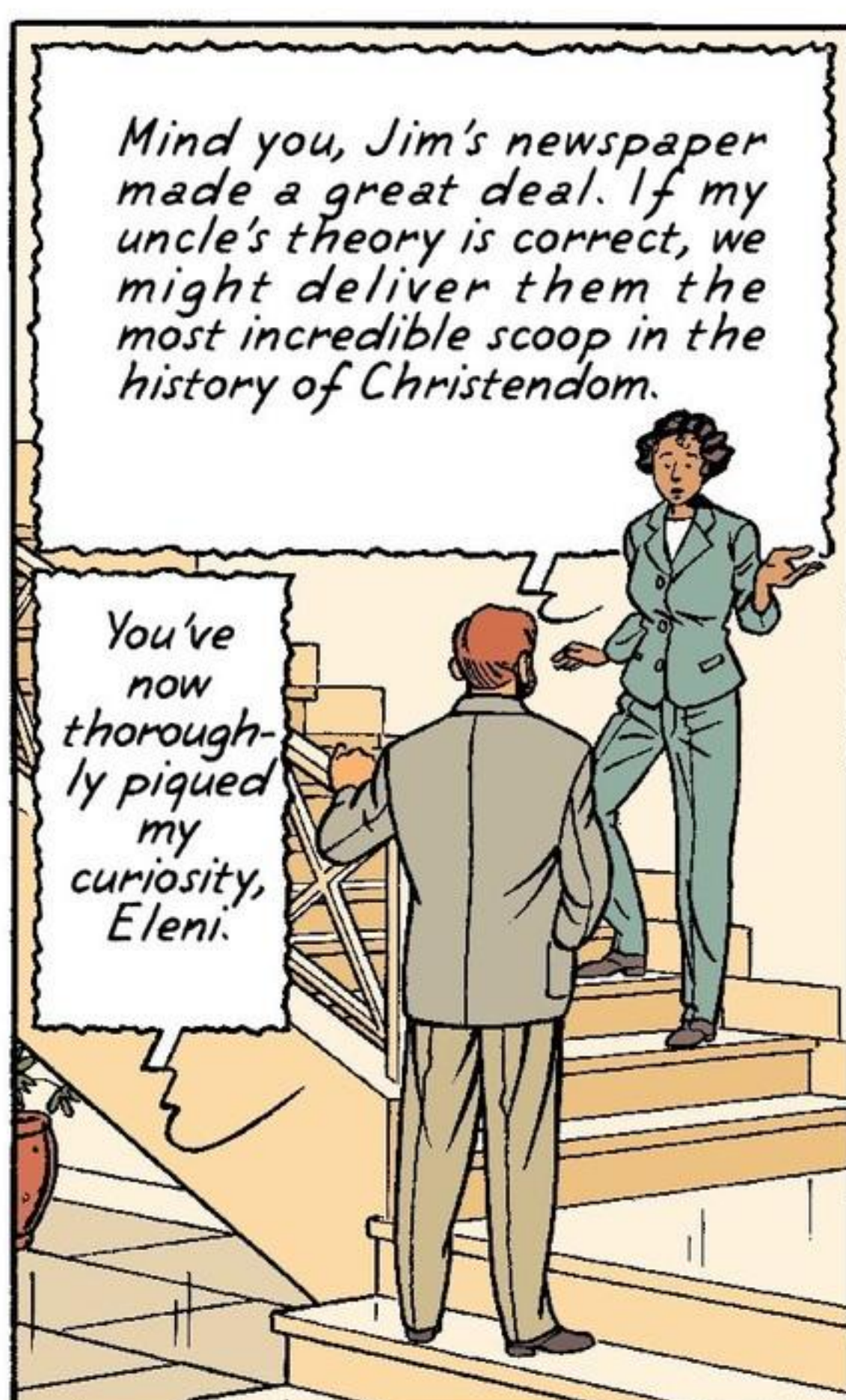
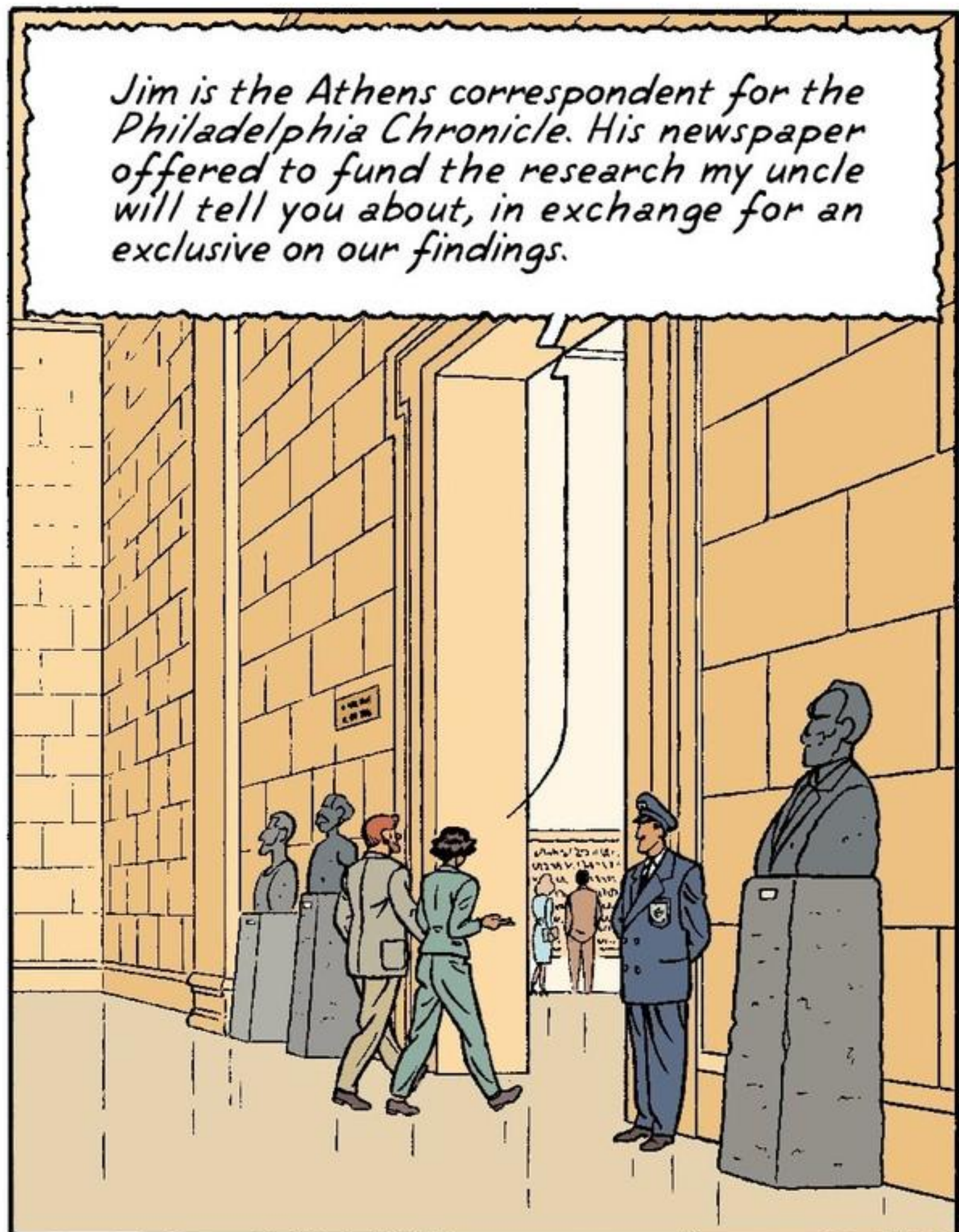
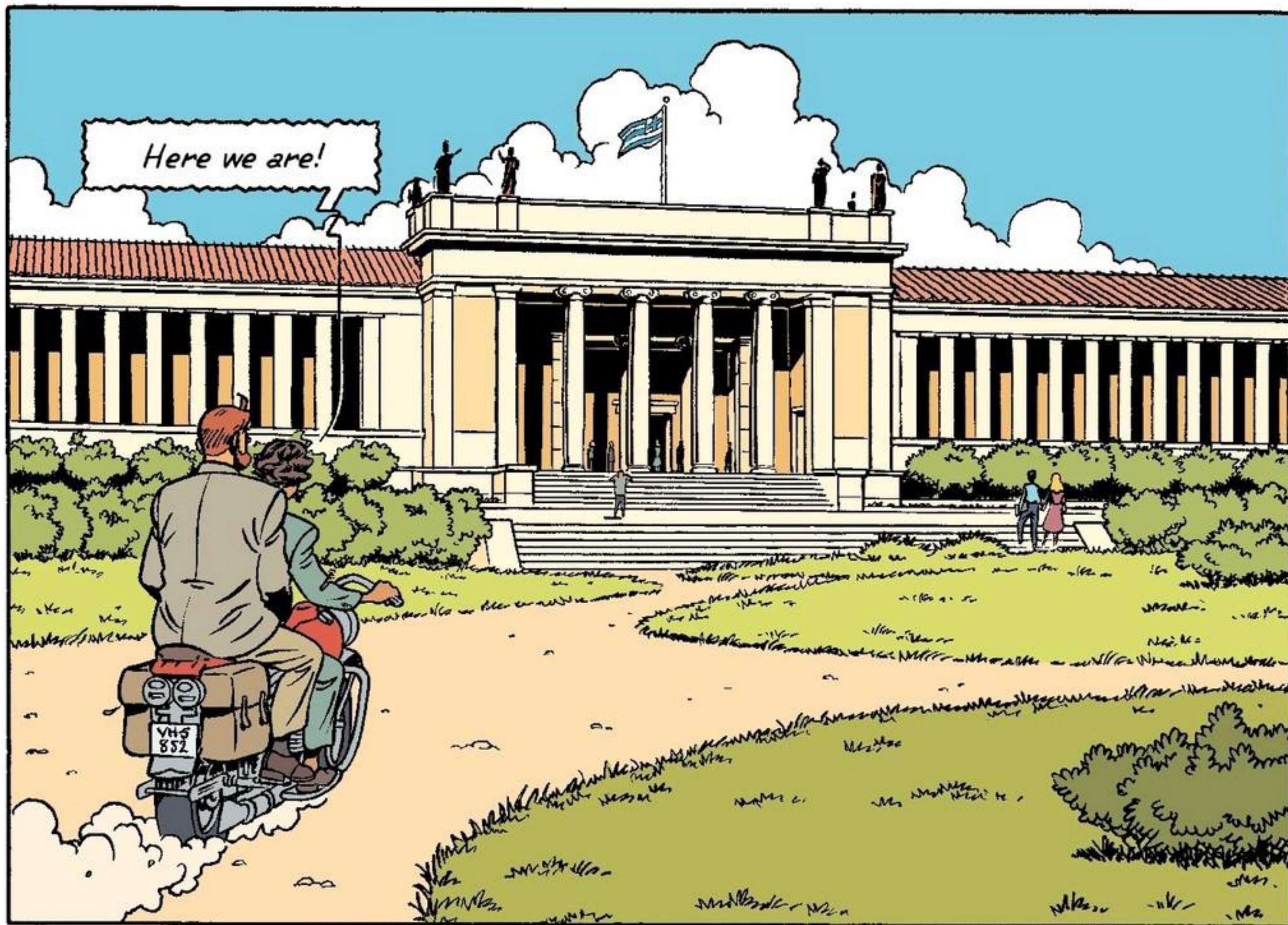
MEANWHILE, INSIDE THE TERMINAL...

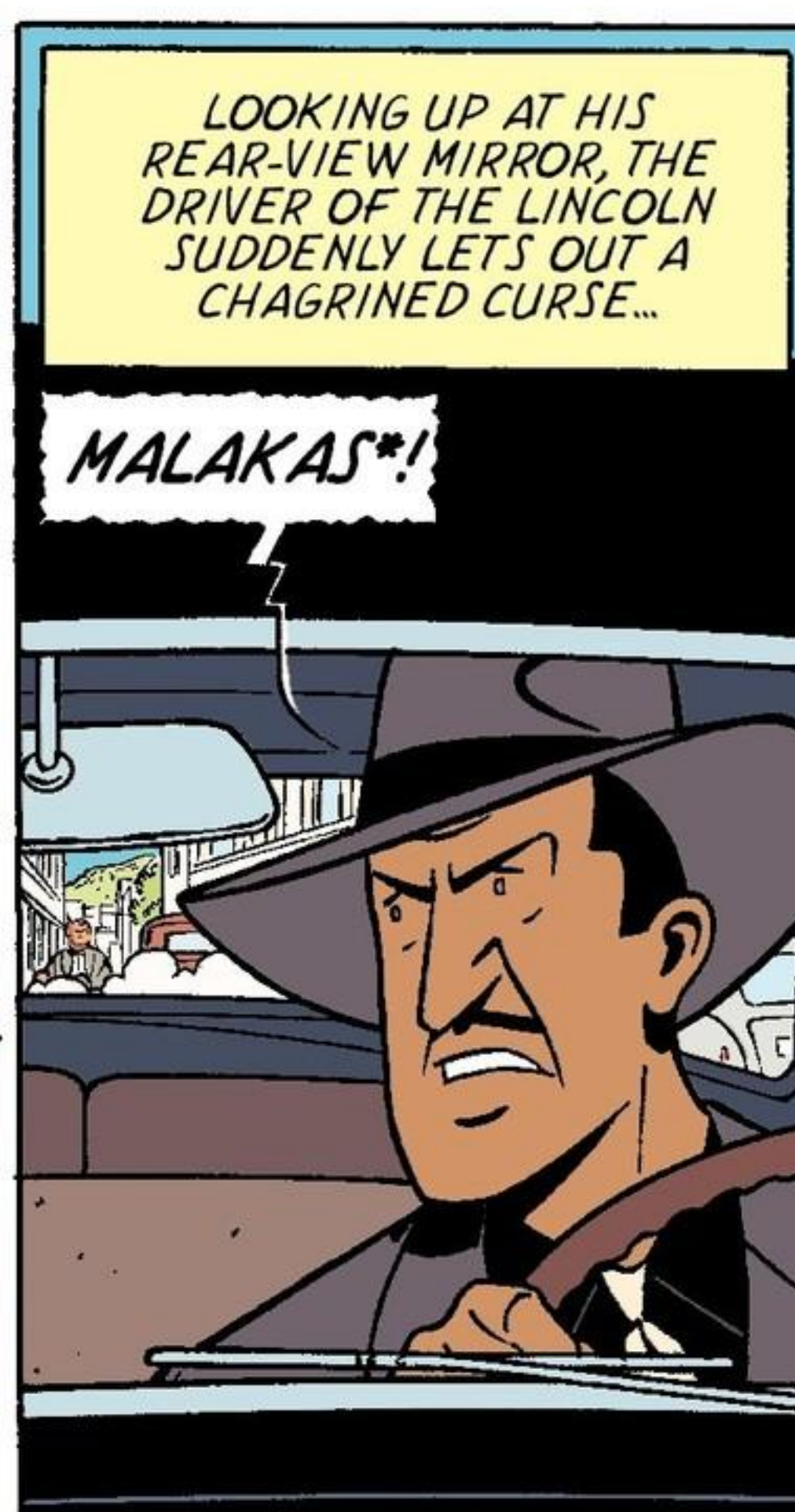
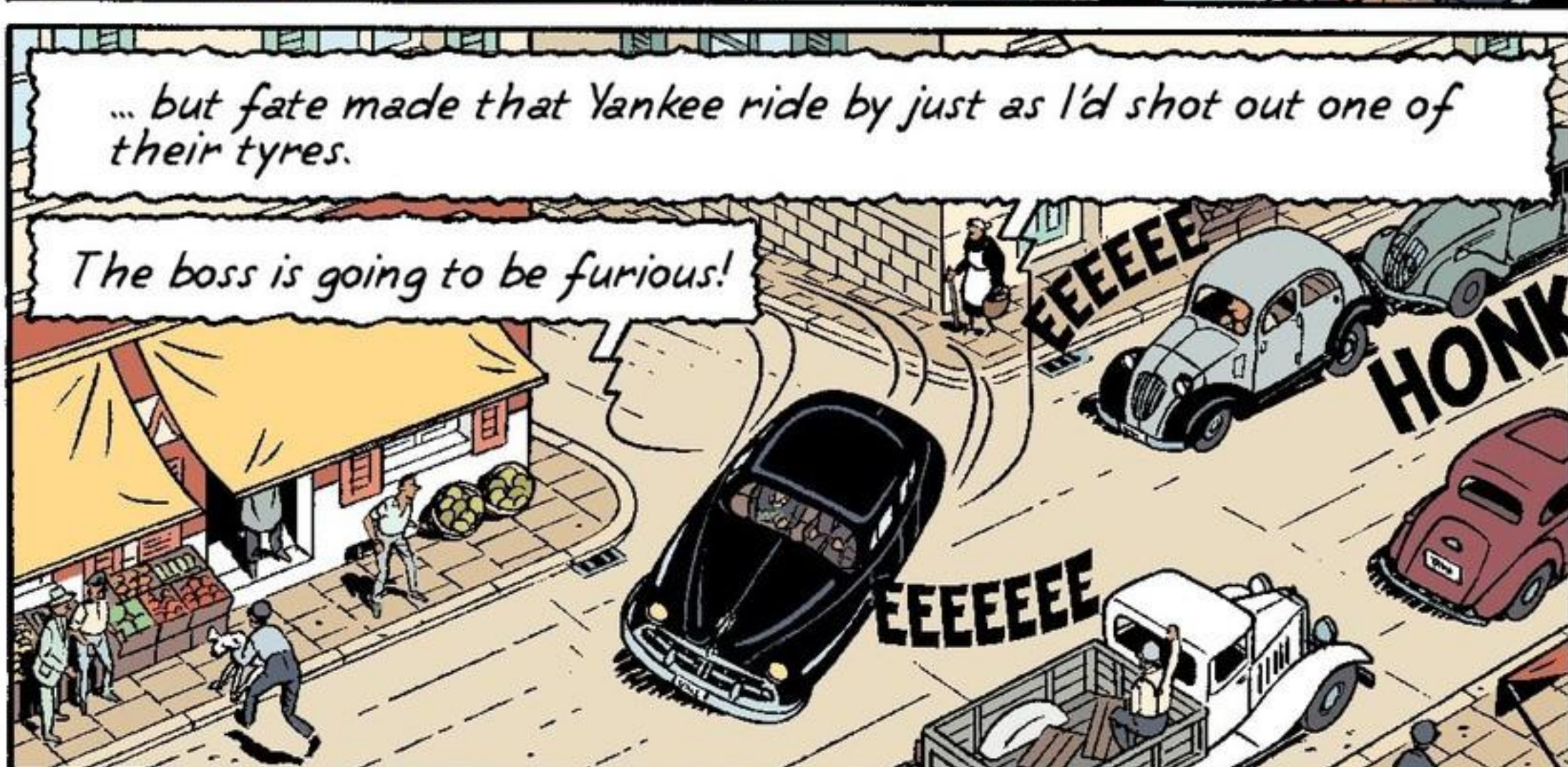
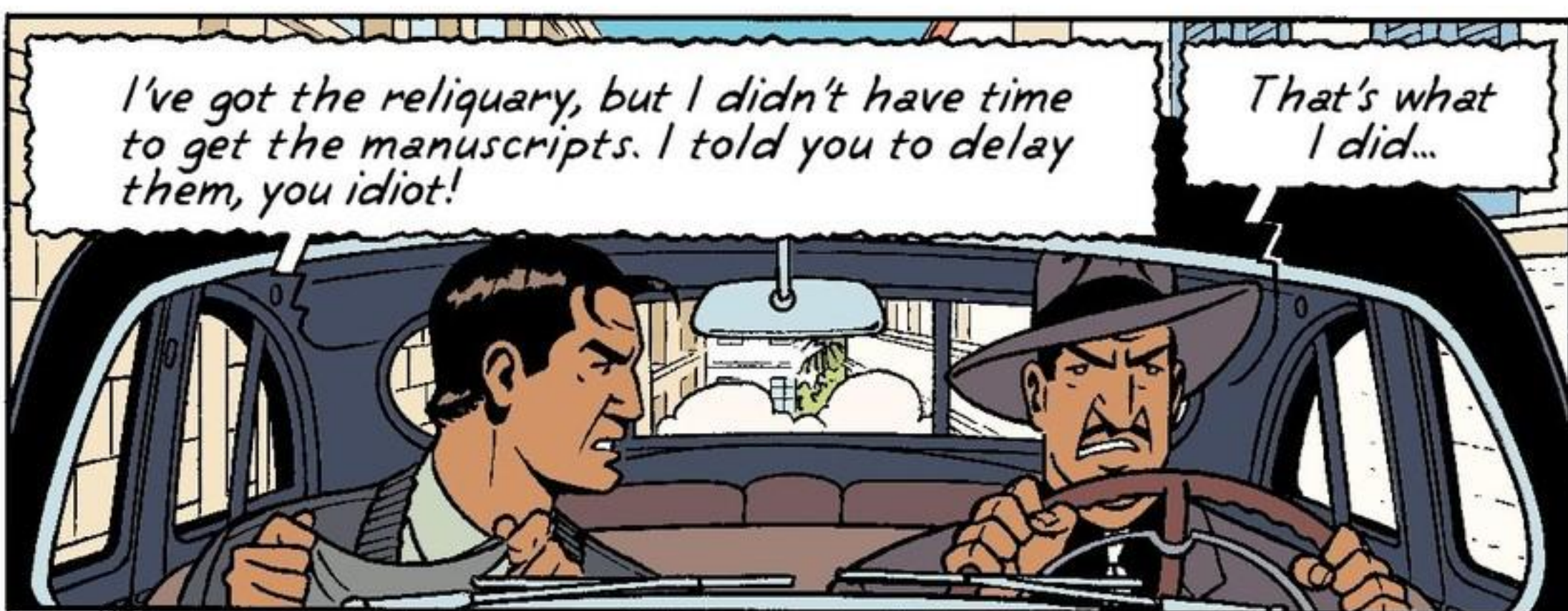
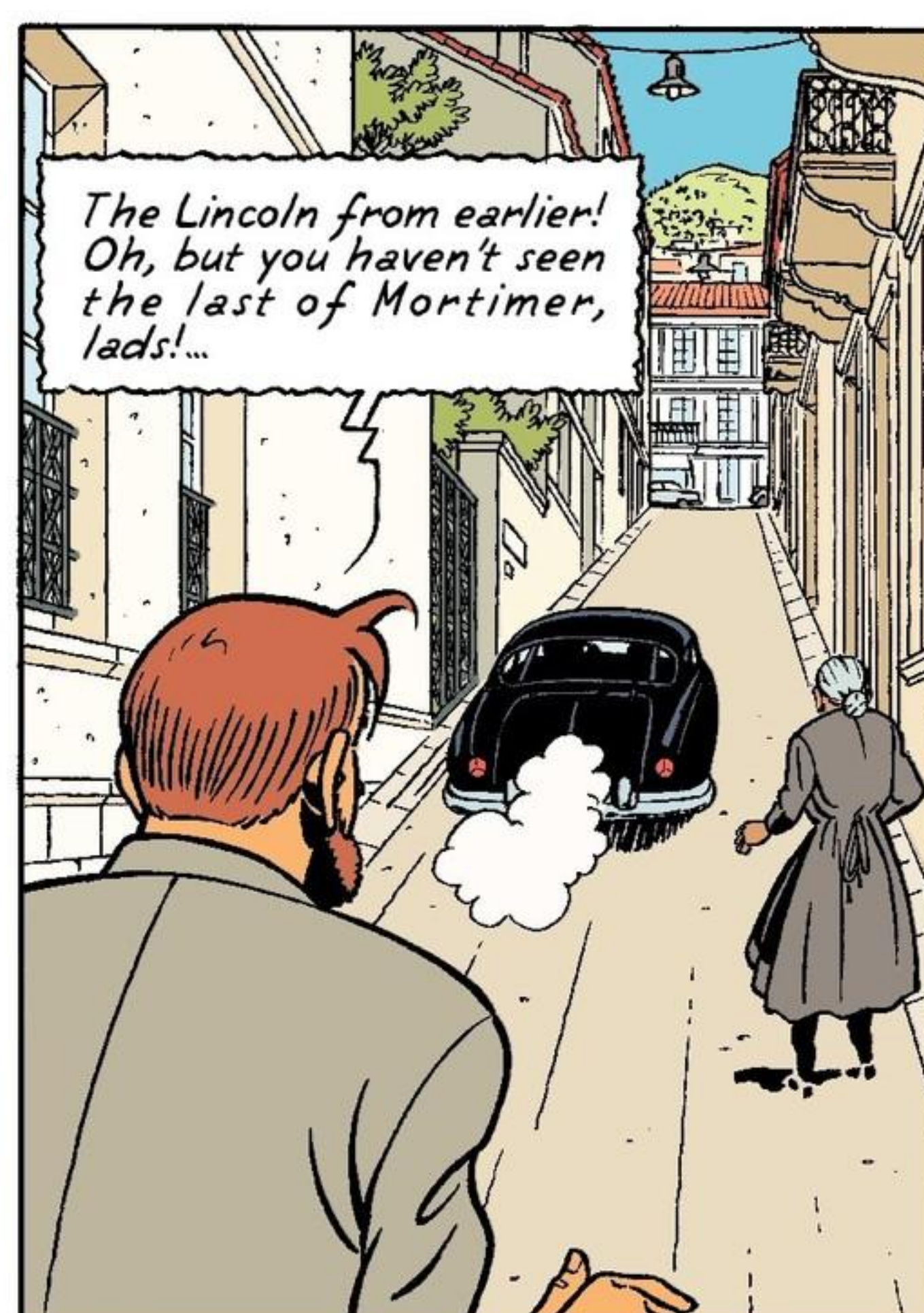
His plane arrived early. What do I do?

Find a way to slow them down without being seen. I need more time.

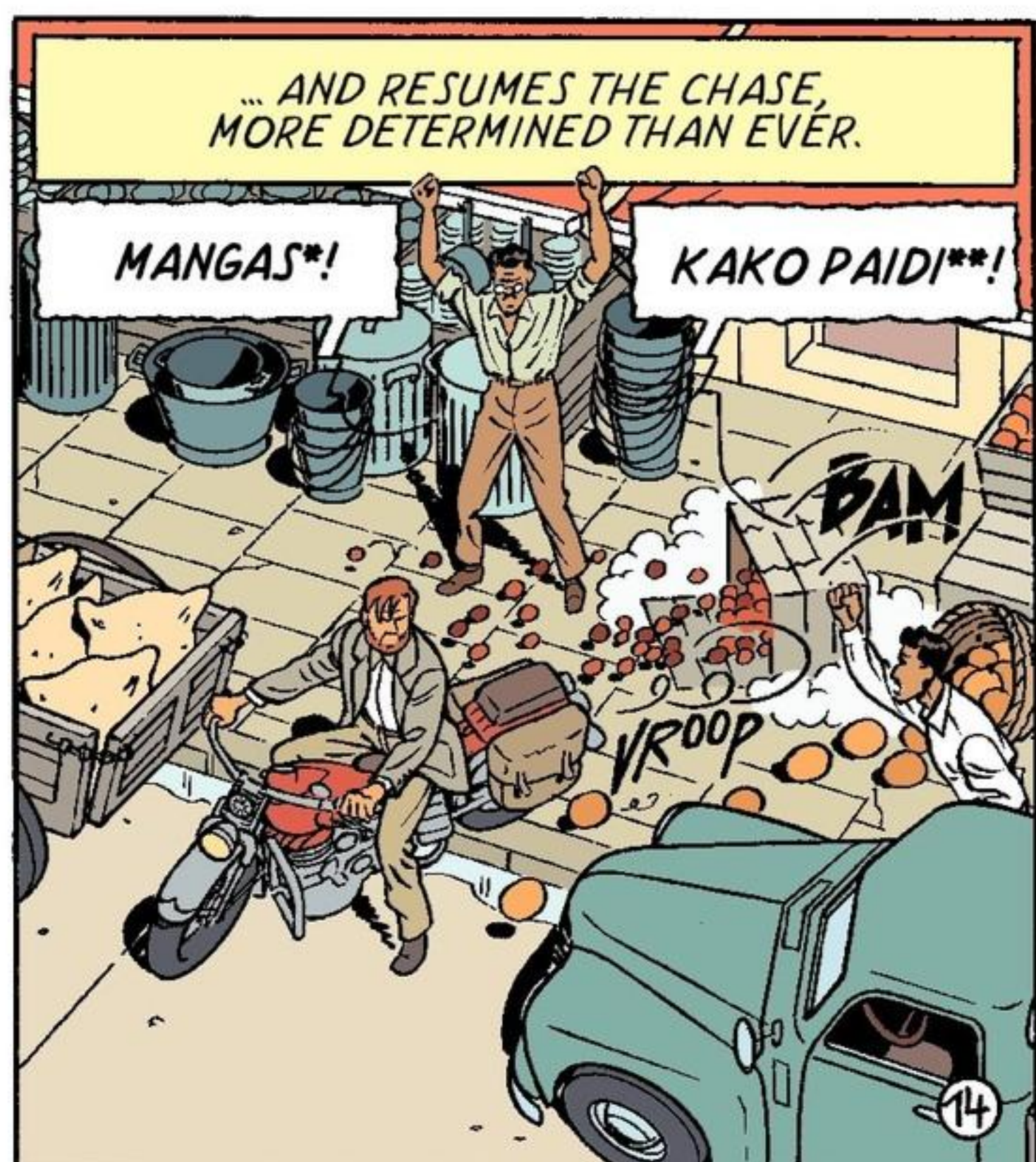
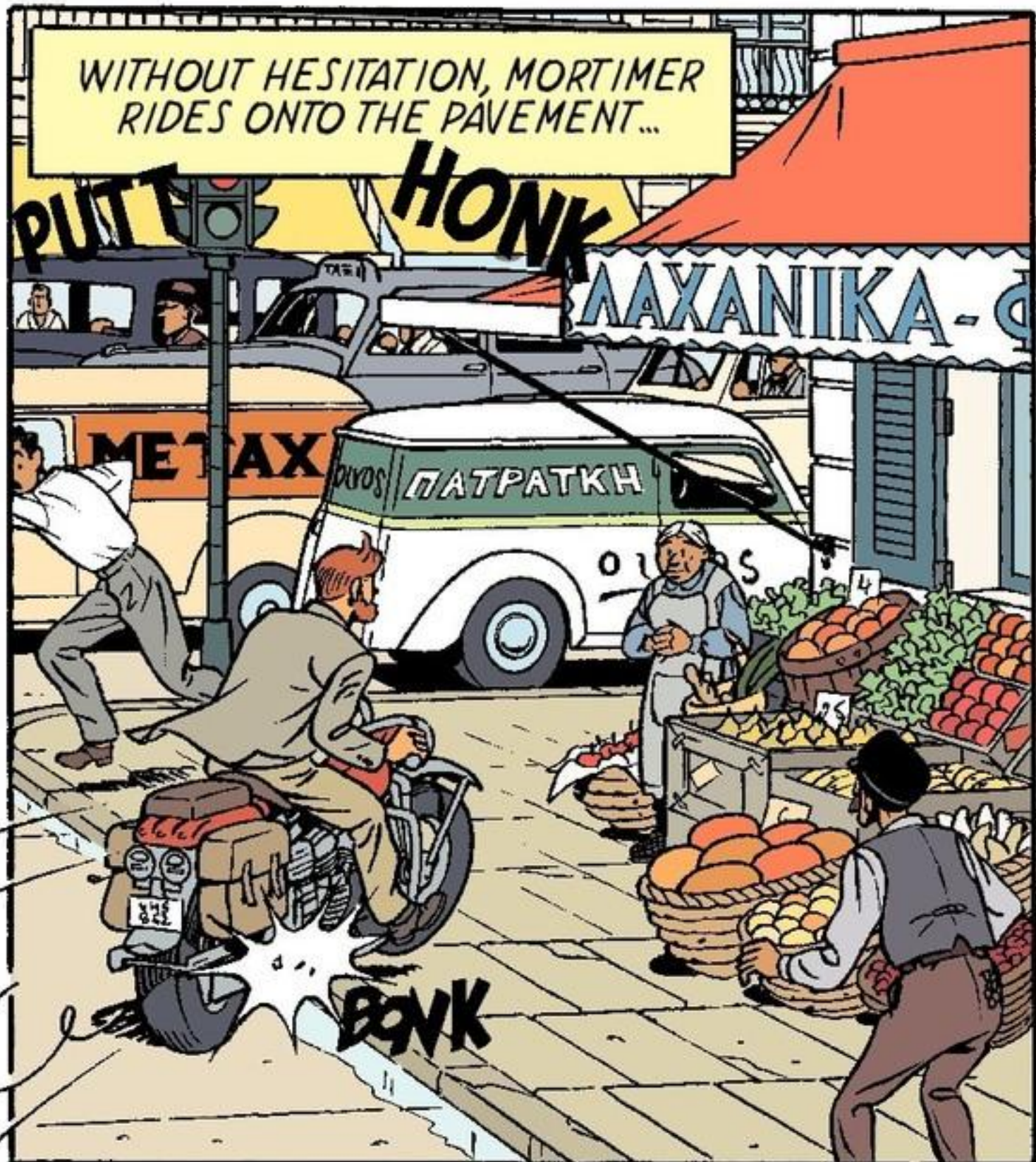
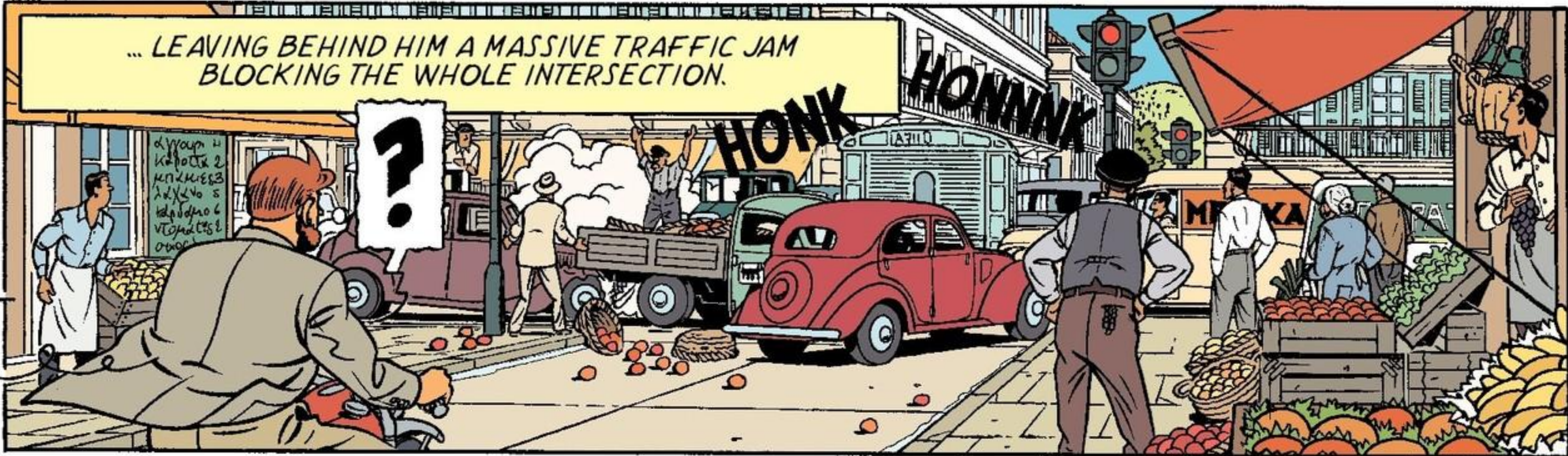
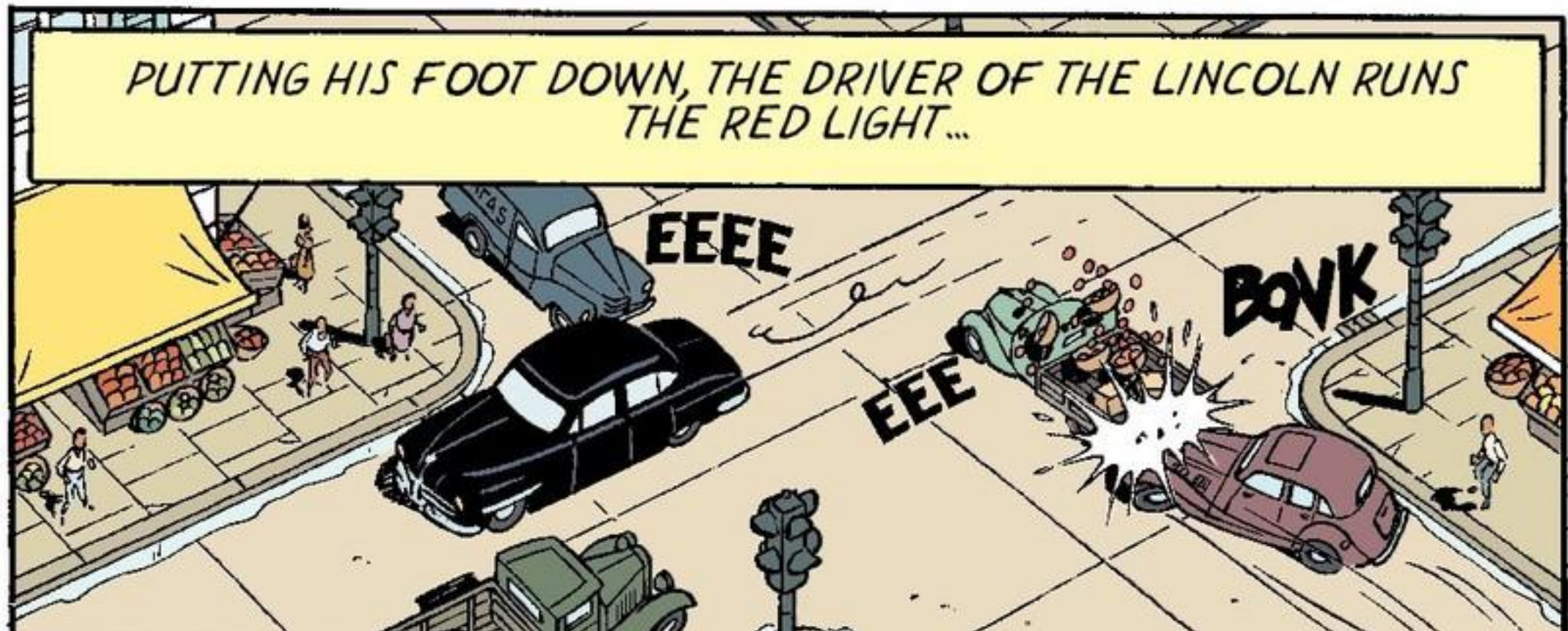
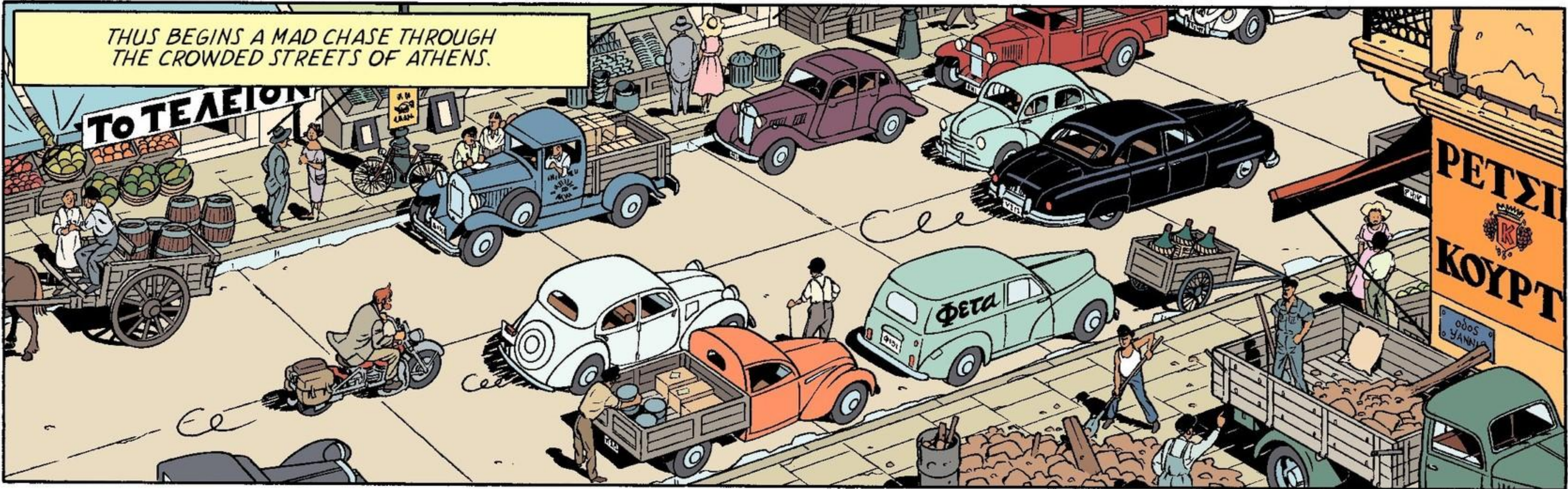






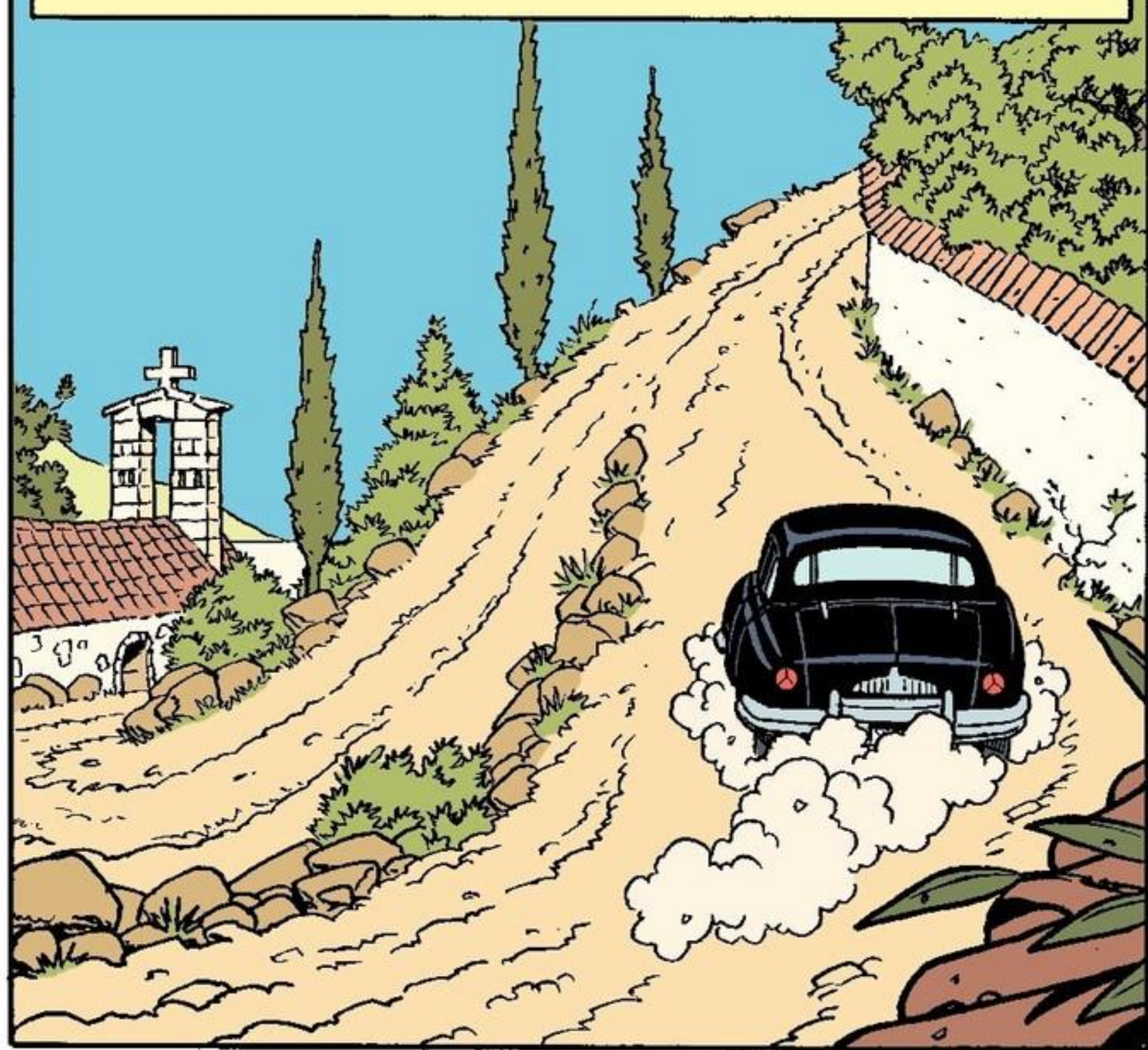


*IN THIS CONTEXT: CRAZY BASTARD



*HOOLIGAN **BAD BOY, SCOUNDREL

AFTER TEARING THROUGH THE SUBURBS, THE FUGITIVES TAKE A SMALL ROAD THAT WINDS UP INTO ONE OF THE HILLS SURROUNDING THE CITY...



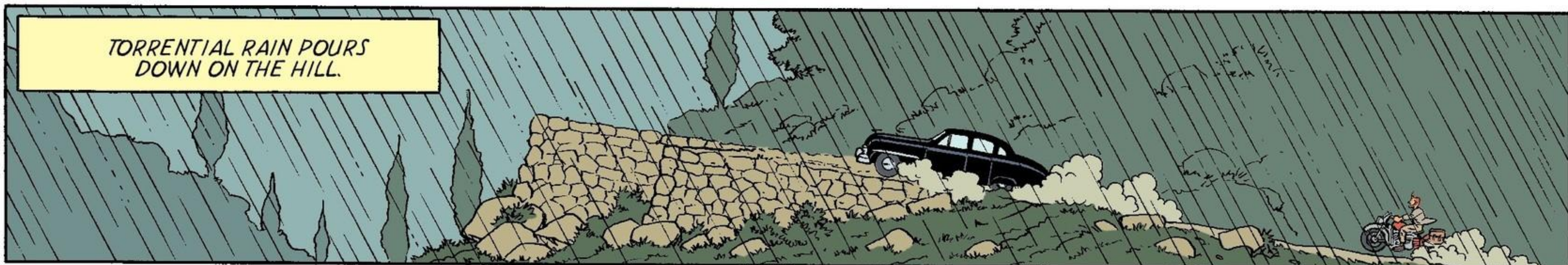
... STILL PURSUED BY THE INDEFATIGABLE PROFESSOR, EVEN THOUGH HE HASN'T SUCCEEDED IN GAINING ON THEM.



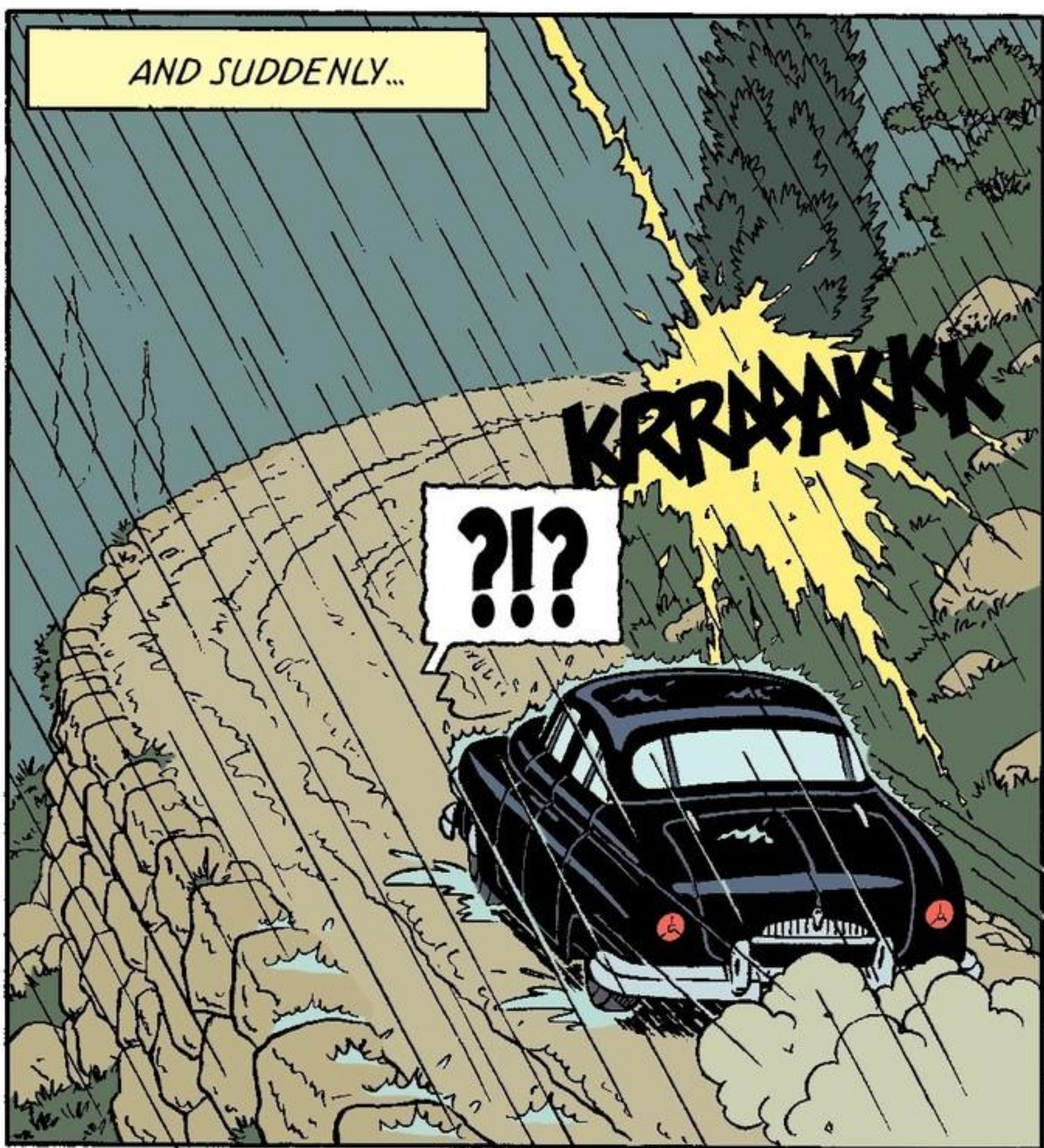
SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING, A MIGHTY LIGHTNING BOLT CRISS-CROSSES THE SKY...



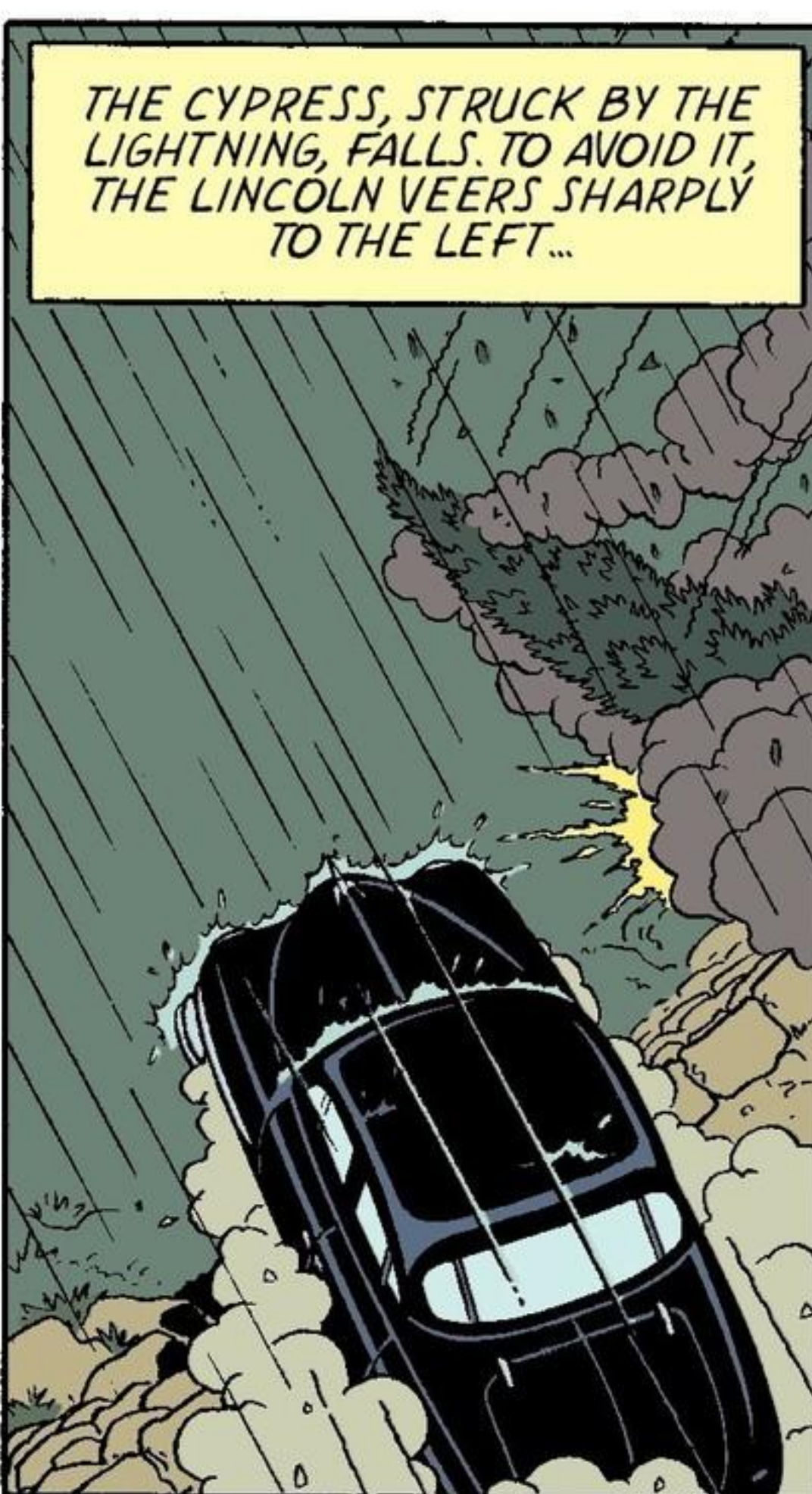
TORRENTIAL RAIN POURS DOWN ON THE HILL.



AND SUDDENLY...



THE CYPRESS, STRUCK BY THE LIGHTNING, FALLS. TO AVOID IT, THE LINCOLN VEERS SHARPLY TO THE LEFT...

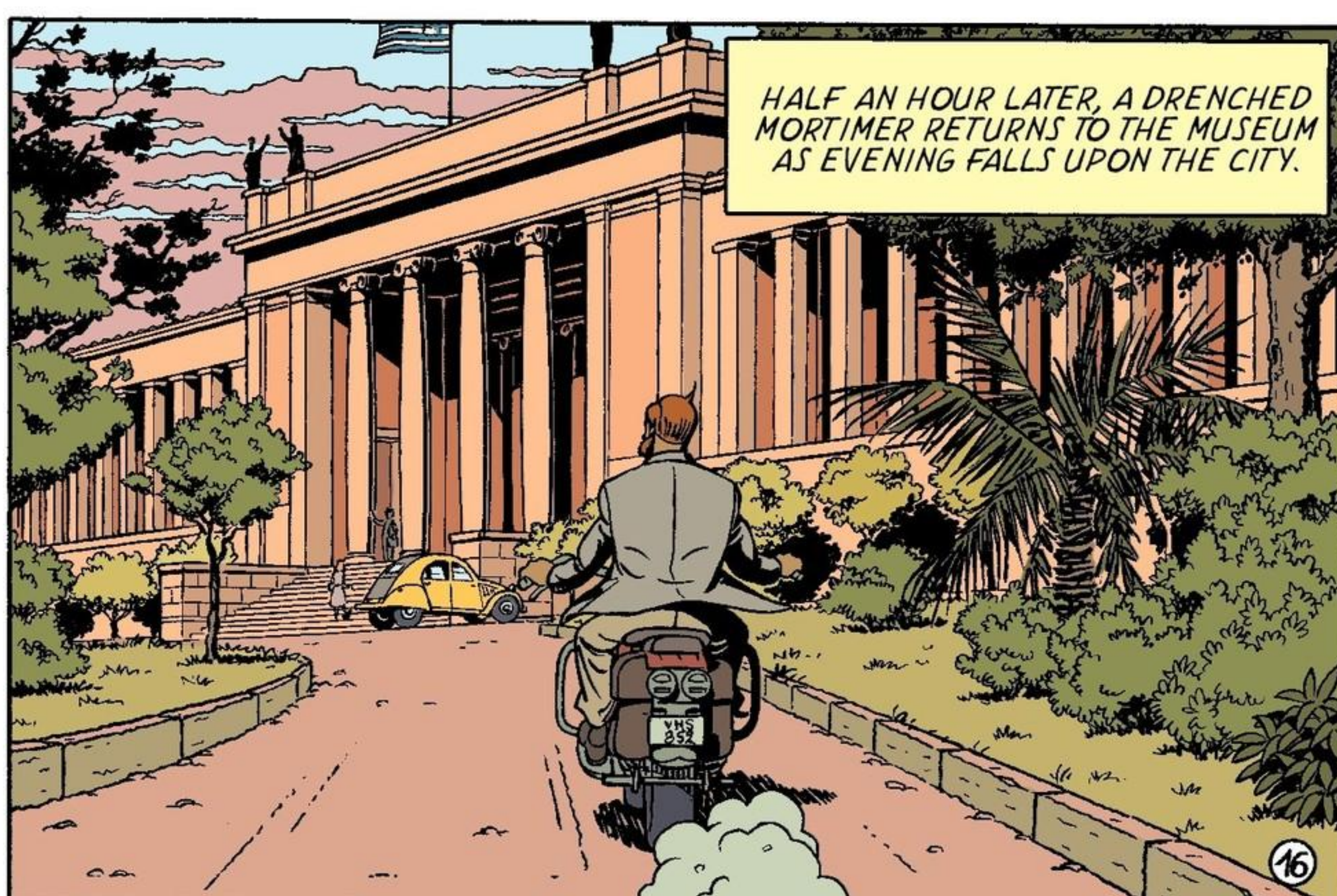
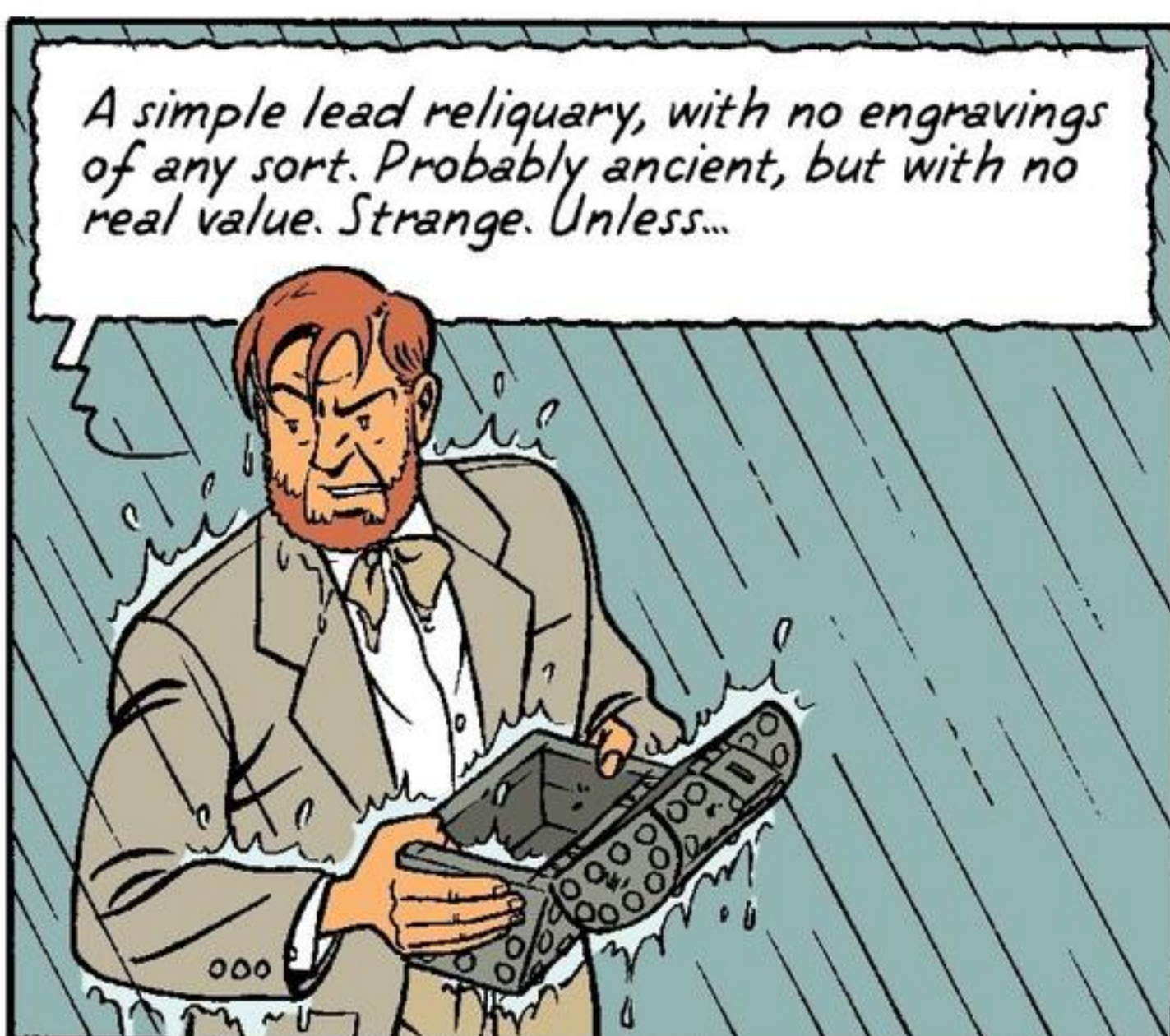
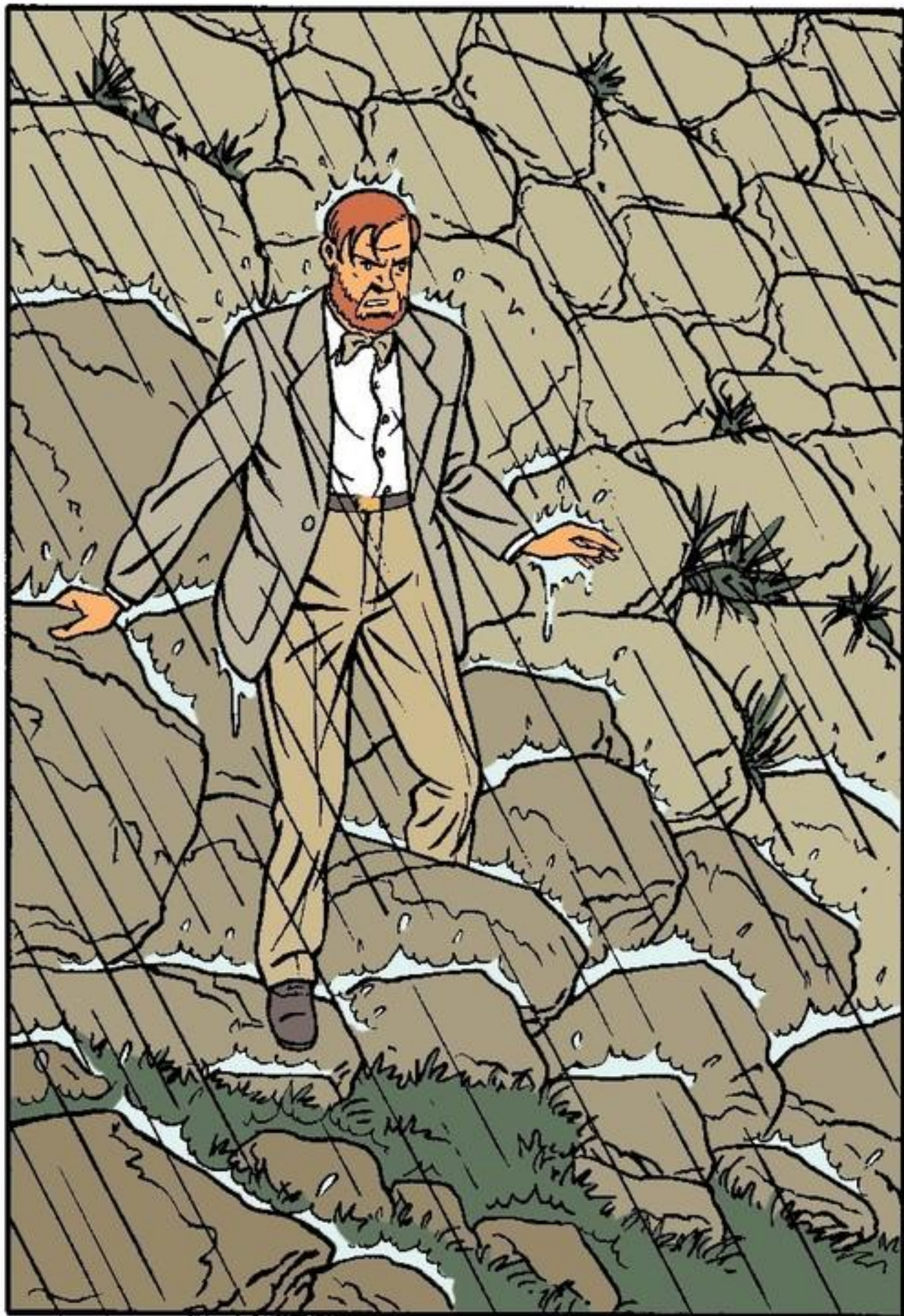


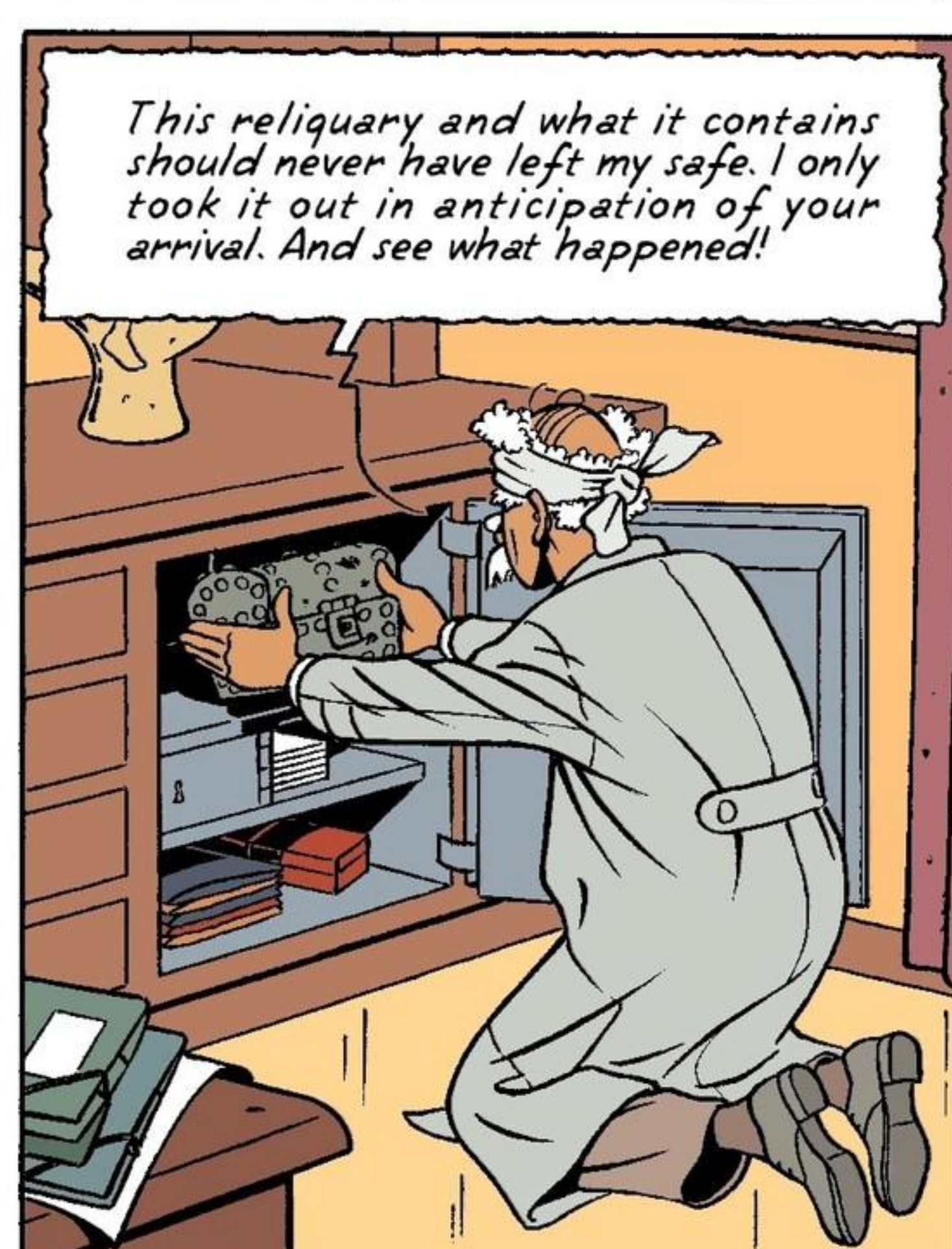
... AND TOPPLES INTO SPACE.

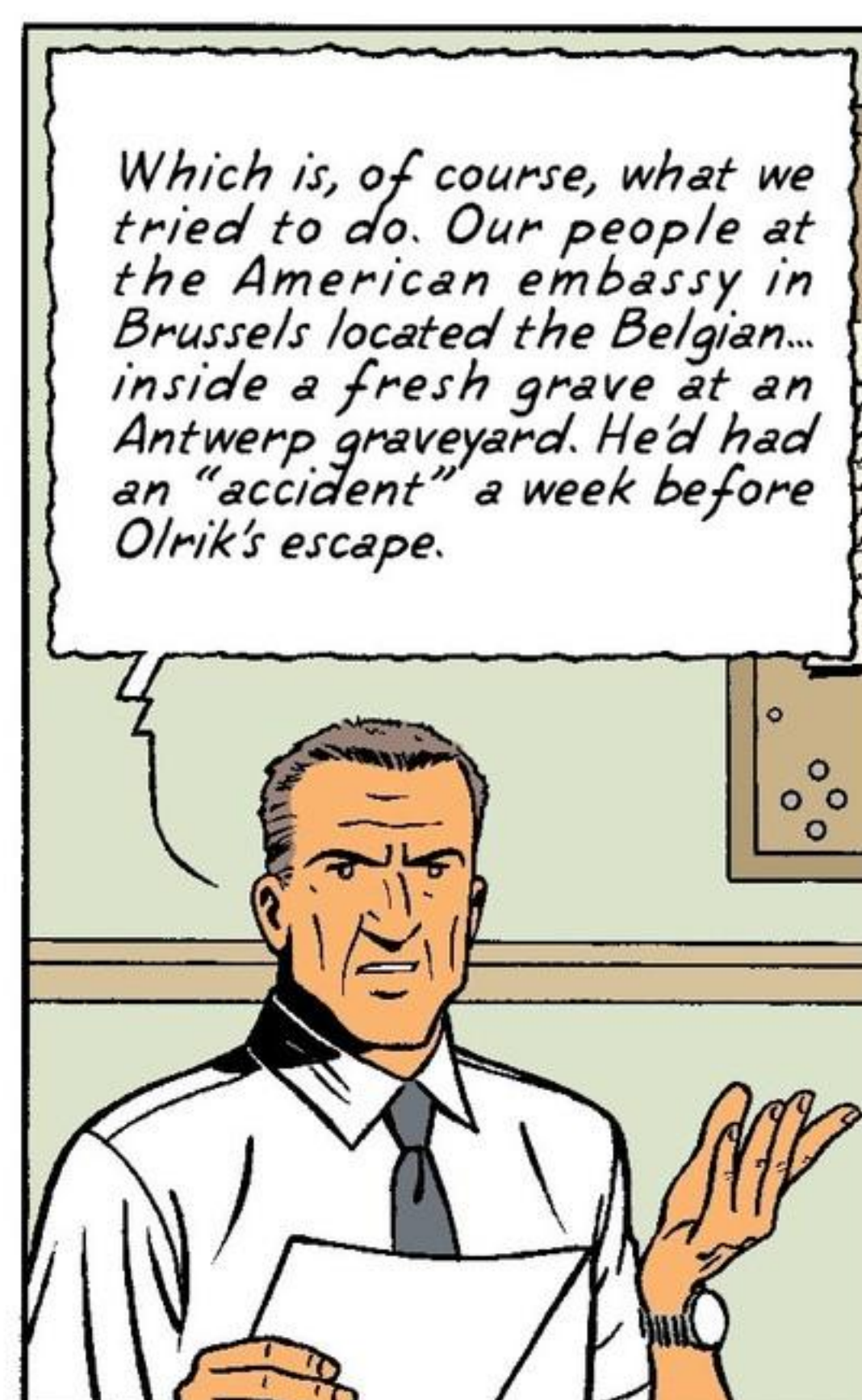
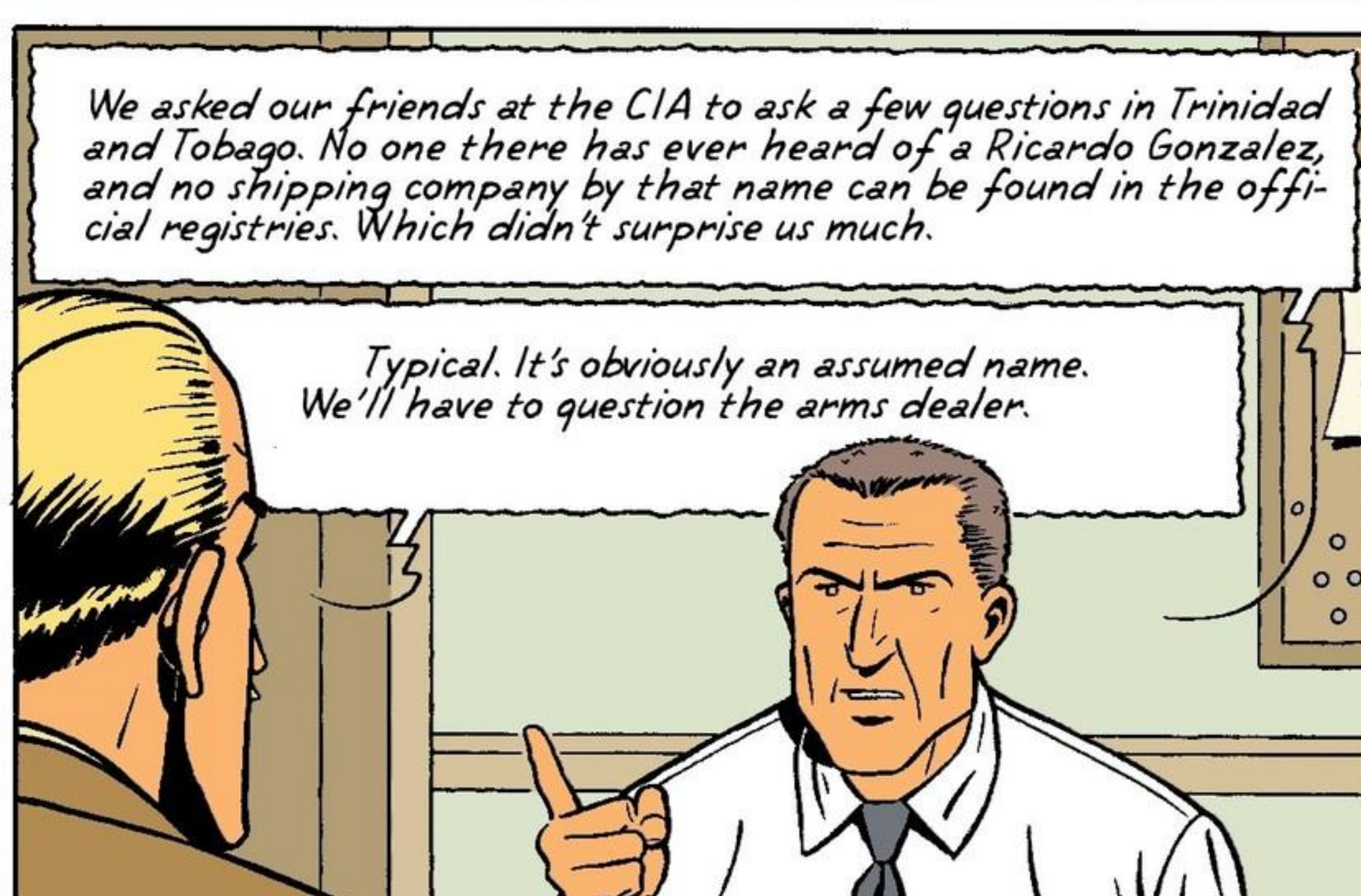
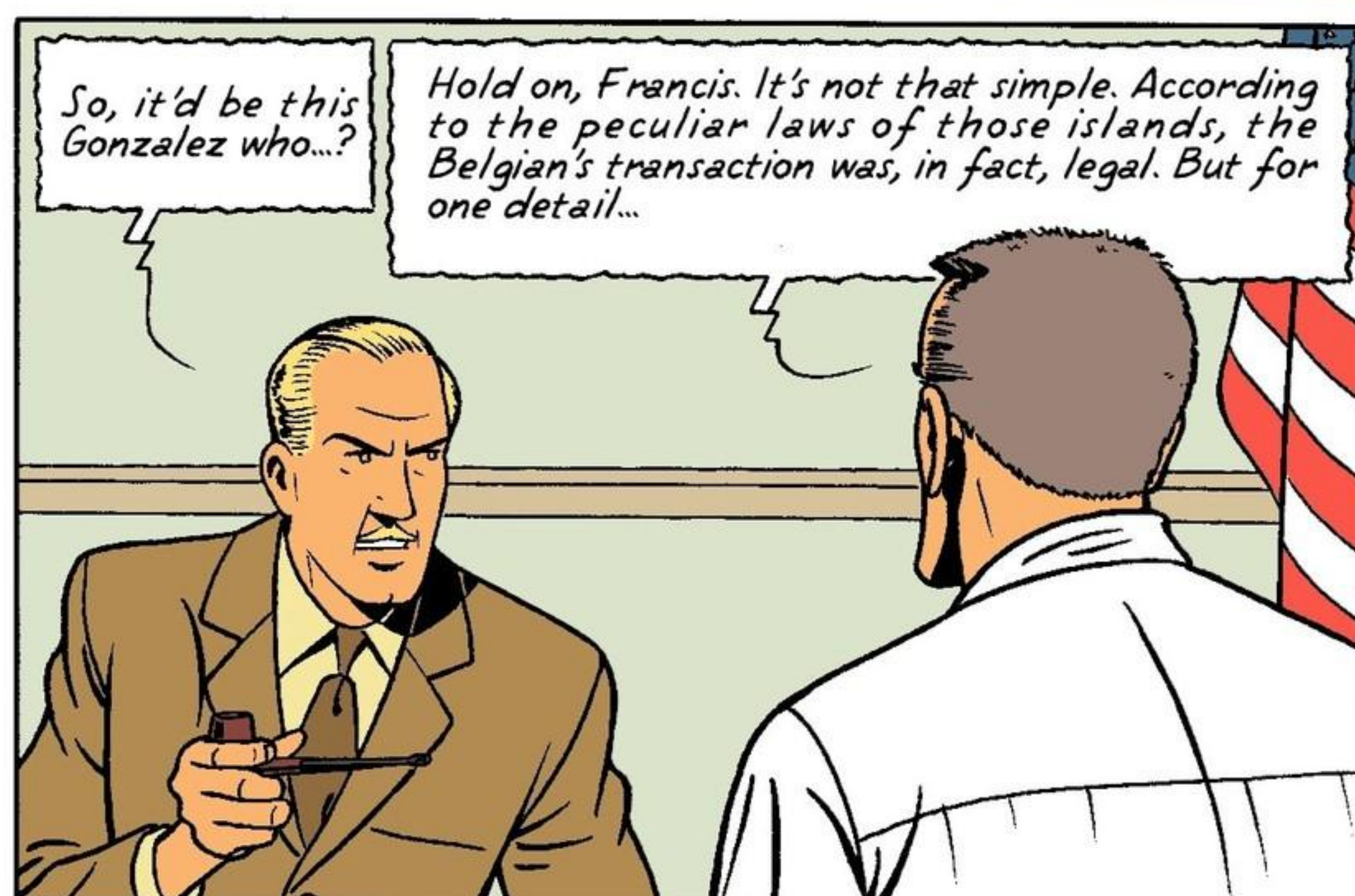
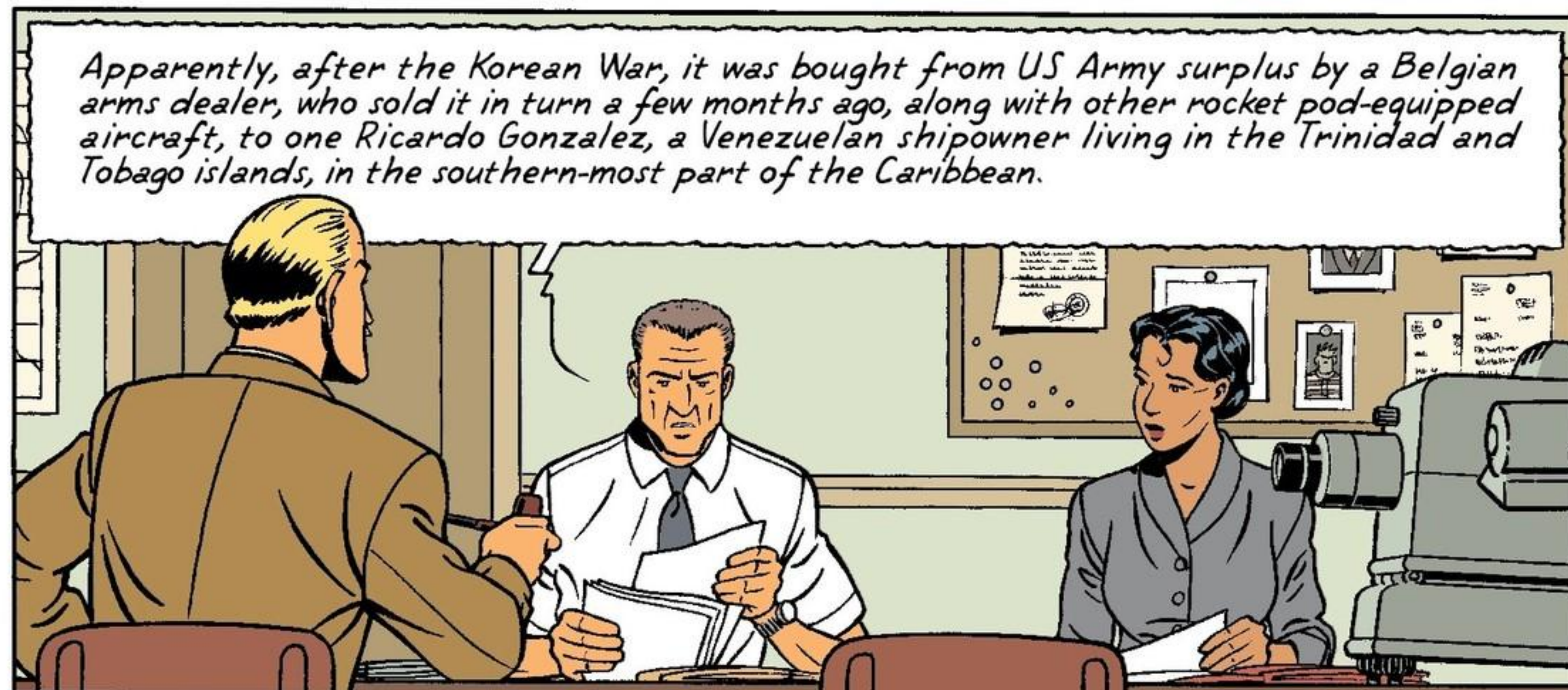


Well. Looks like those two gentlemen are done for.









The first we heard of the name Belukian was in a Soviet P.O.W. camp near Mauthausen, Austria. He was one of the 3,000 survivors freed by our GIs in May '45.



He claimed to be Armenian, a carpenter by trade, and to have been captured by the Germans on the Eastern Front in September '44. Sent back to the Soviet Union—of which Armenia is part—with temporary papers, he vanished.



Only to reappear five years later, the fabulously wealthy owner of many businesses across the world, usually through a myriad of shell companies and straw men.



Oil companies, newspapers, car manufacturers, airlines... and more. He gave very few interviews and always refused to be photographed. This picture, taken by one of our agents in Philadelphia, is one of the few we have. See what the result is when it's blown up.



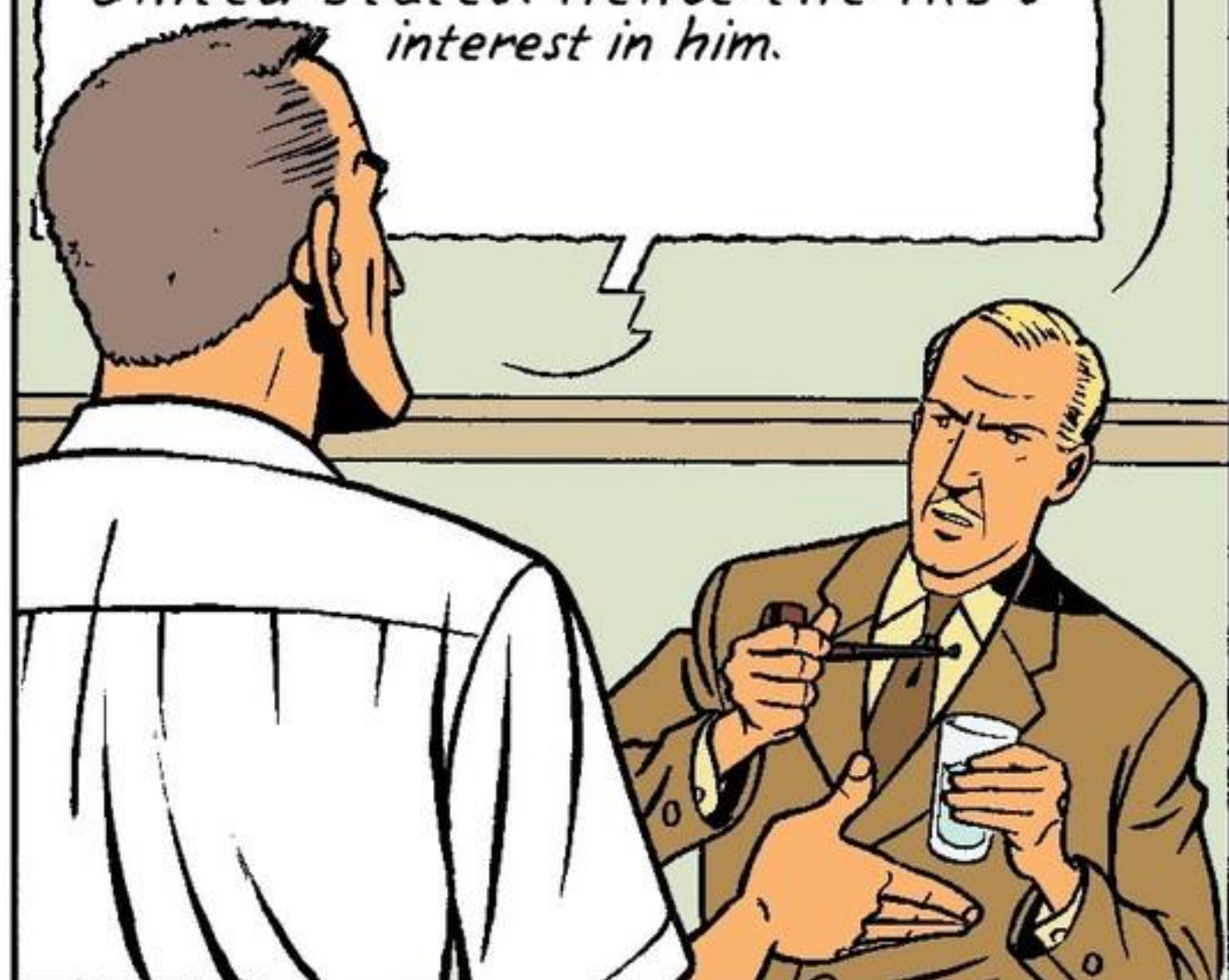
I'll grant you that there's a resemblance. But it's not enough to establish clearly that this Belukian is the so-called Ricardo Gonzalez we suspect of breaking out Olrik. This is all very nebulous, old chap.

Unfortunately. Even more so since Belukian is not, in fact, Belukian...



What do you mean, John?!

The FBI and the CIA, acting on orders from the Treasury Department, have been investigating him for years—imagine, a businessman who sprang out of nowhere with a fortune as considerable as it is sudden. He's become stateless, and is therefore not a US citizen, but he owns several companies in the United States. Hence the IRS's interest in him.



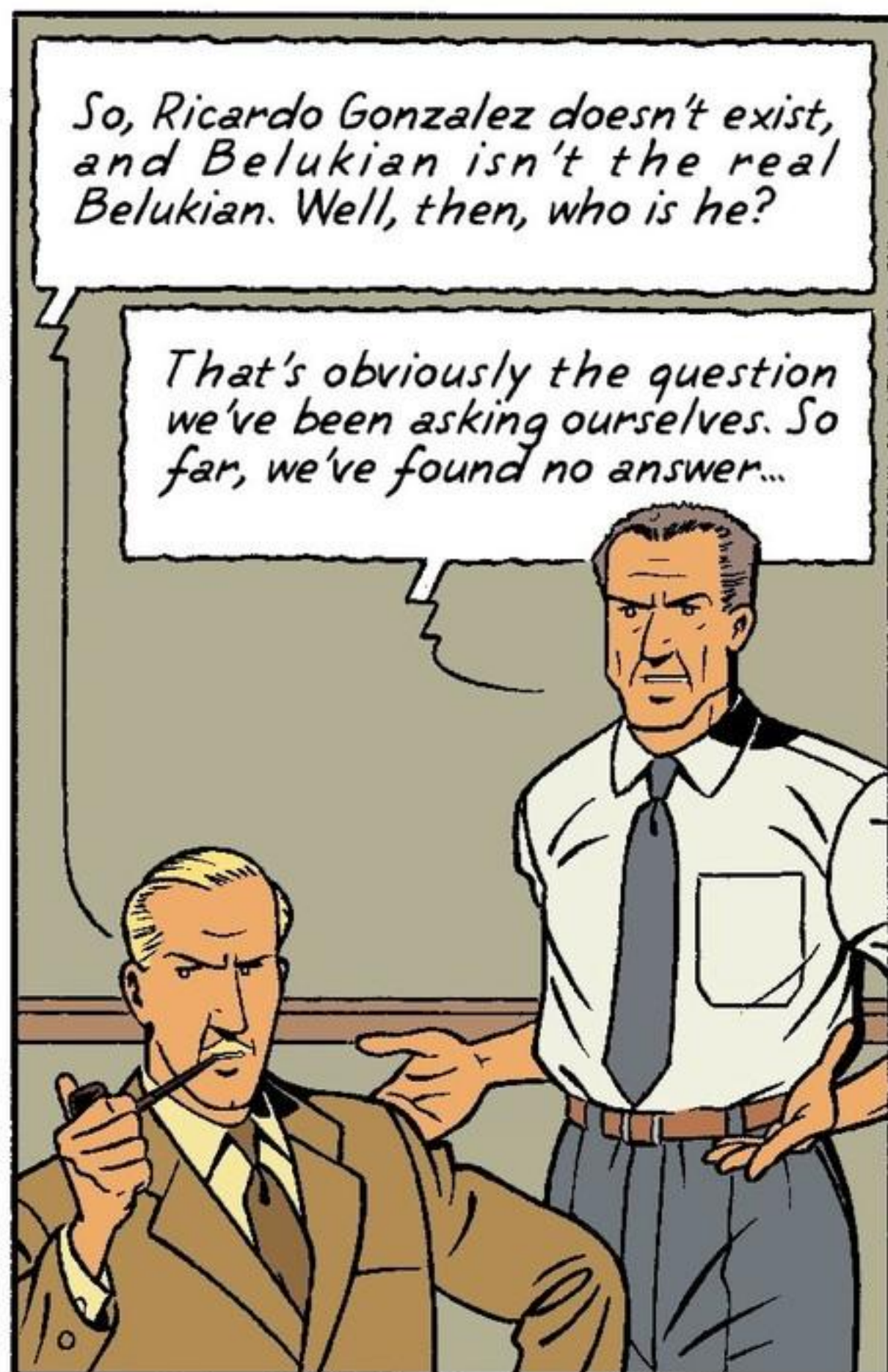
CIA agents in Armenia have found the trail of a Belos Belukian, a carpenter with no relatives from a small village in the north of the country. He was drafted into the Red Army as a simple private in September '42 and never came back. They even managed to get their hands on a photograph taken before the war.



There it is!

!?





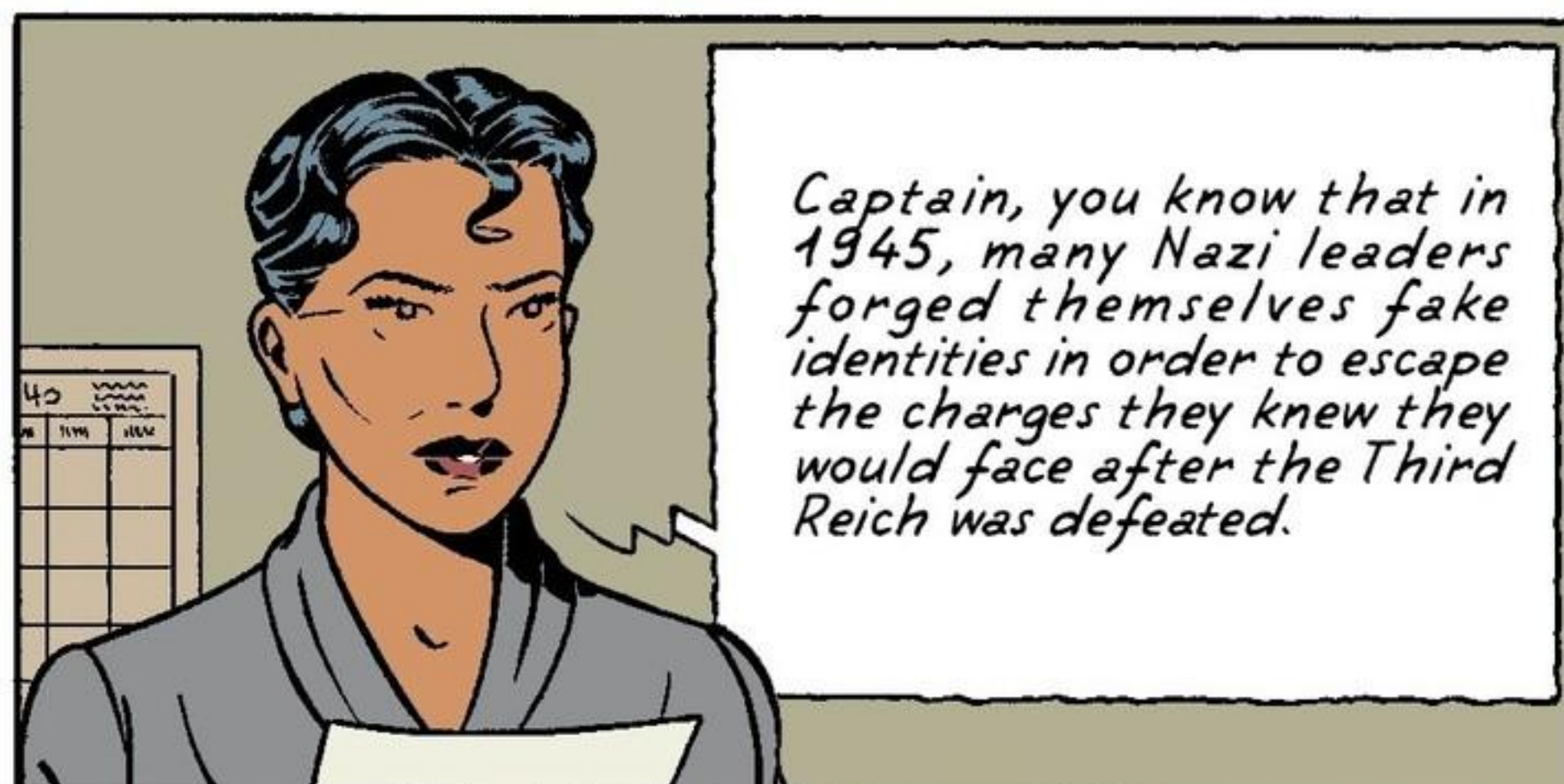
So, Ricardo Gonzalez doesn't exist, and Belukian isn't the real Belukian. Well, then, who is he?

That's obviously the question we've been asking ourselves. So far, we've found no answer...

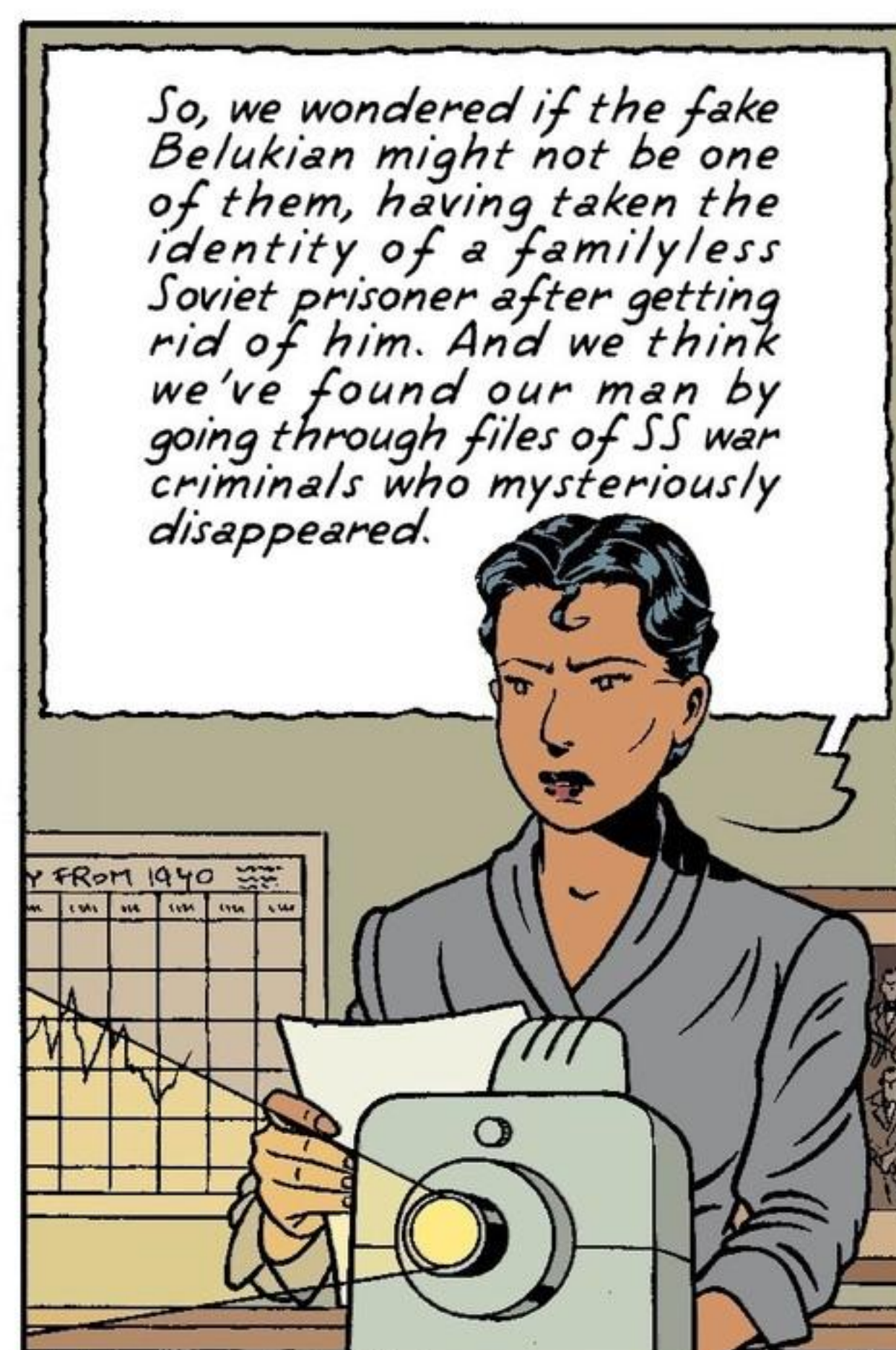


... although we have a... rather wild hypothesis. Over to you, Jessie.

Thanks, John.



Captain, you know that in 1945, many Nazi leaders forged themselves fake identities in order to escape the charges they knew they would face after the Third Reich was defeated.



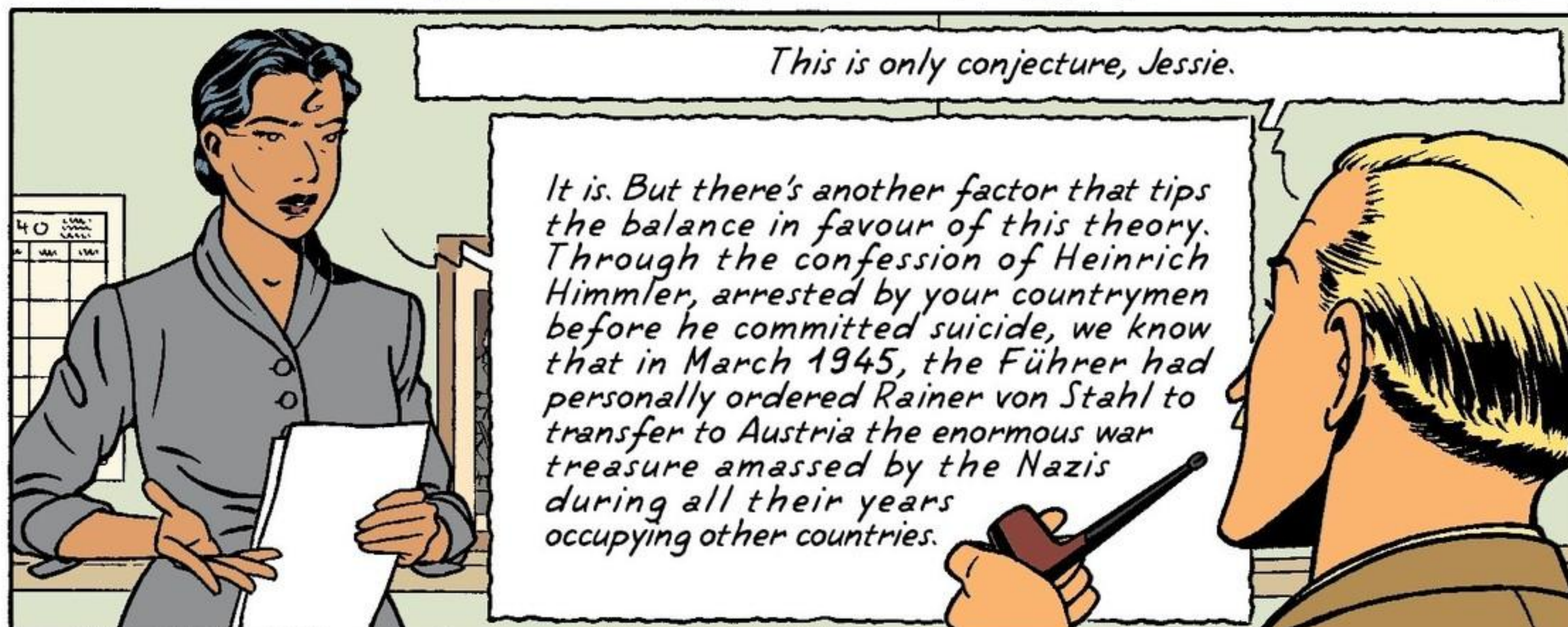
So, we wondered if the fake Belukian might not be one of them, having taken the identity of a familyless Soviet prisoner after getting rid of him. And we think we've found our man by going through files of SS war criminals who mysteriously disappeared.



Rainer von Stahl, son of a Viennese aristocrat and a Russo-Armenian countess. An early convert to Nazism, regularly seen among Adolf Hitler's entourage; standartenführer (SS colonel) in the Totenkopf* Panzer Division, responsible for the massacre of thousands of civilians in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia.



Beyond the rather striking resemblance, there's also the fact that Stahl spoke Russian and Armenian as well as English and, of course, German. Therefore, it would have been easy for him to pass himself off as a poor Armenian soldier of the Red Army, prisoner in an Austrian stalag**.



This is only conjecture, Jessie.

It is. But there's another factor that tips the balance in favour of this theory. Through the confession of Heinrich Himmler, arrested by your countrymen before he committed suicide, we know that in March 1945, the Führer had personally ordered Rainer von Stahl to transfer to Austria the enormous war treasure amassed by the Nazis during all their years occupying other countries.



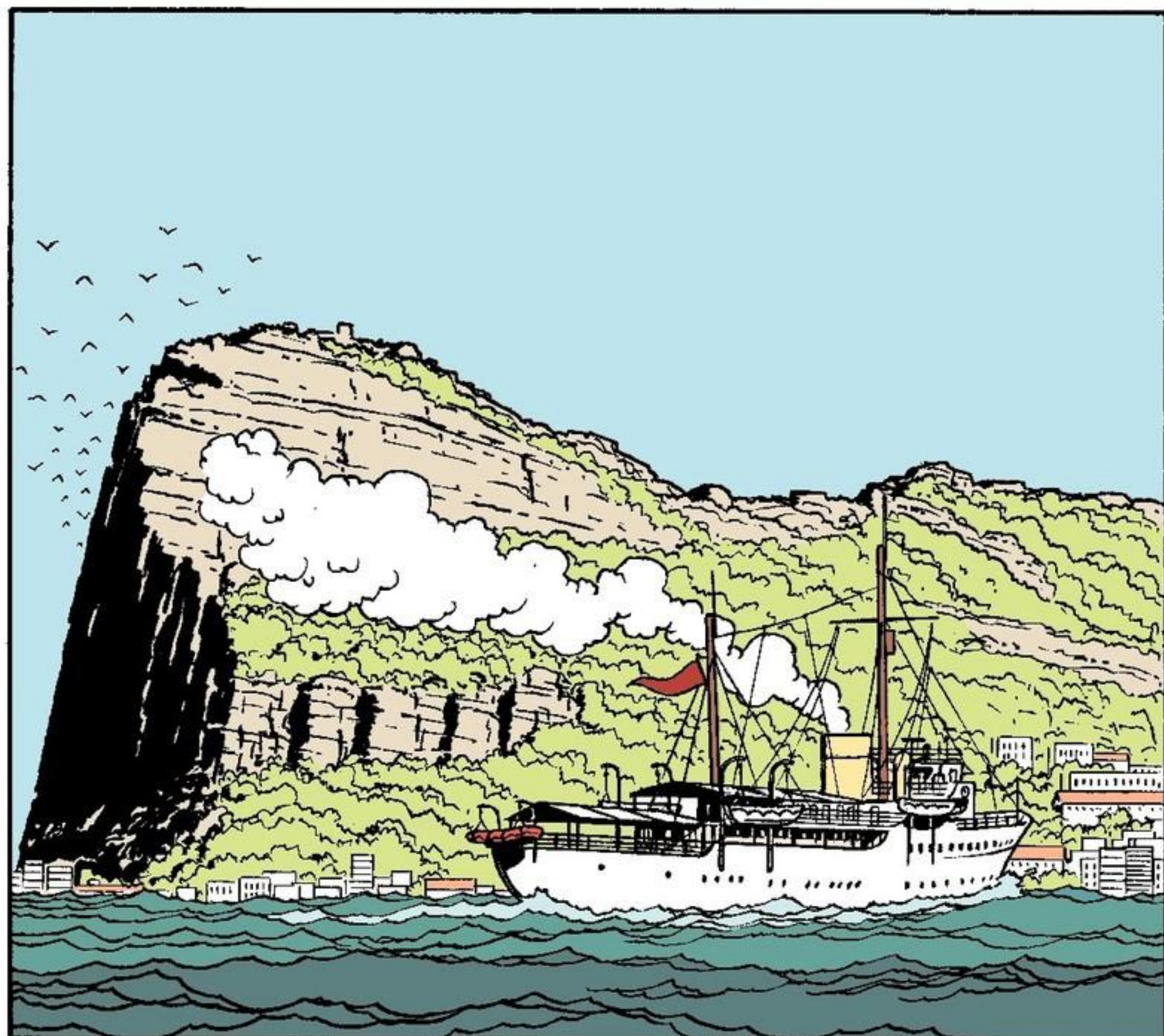
As it happens, that treasure has never been found. It was at the same time that von Stahl "disappeared." In Austria, the very same place where Belukian appeared a few weeks later, "freed" from his stalag by the Americans. Wouldn't it be a plausible explanation for the sudden wealth of this purported little Armenian carpenter?



Plausible, indeed. But why did this von Stahl, or Belukian, or Gonzalez, help Olrik escape?

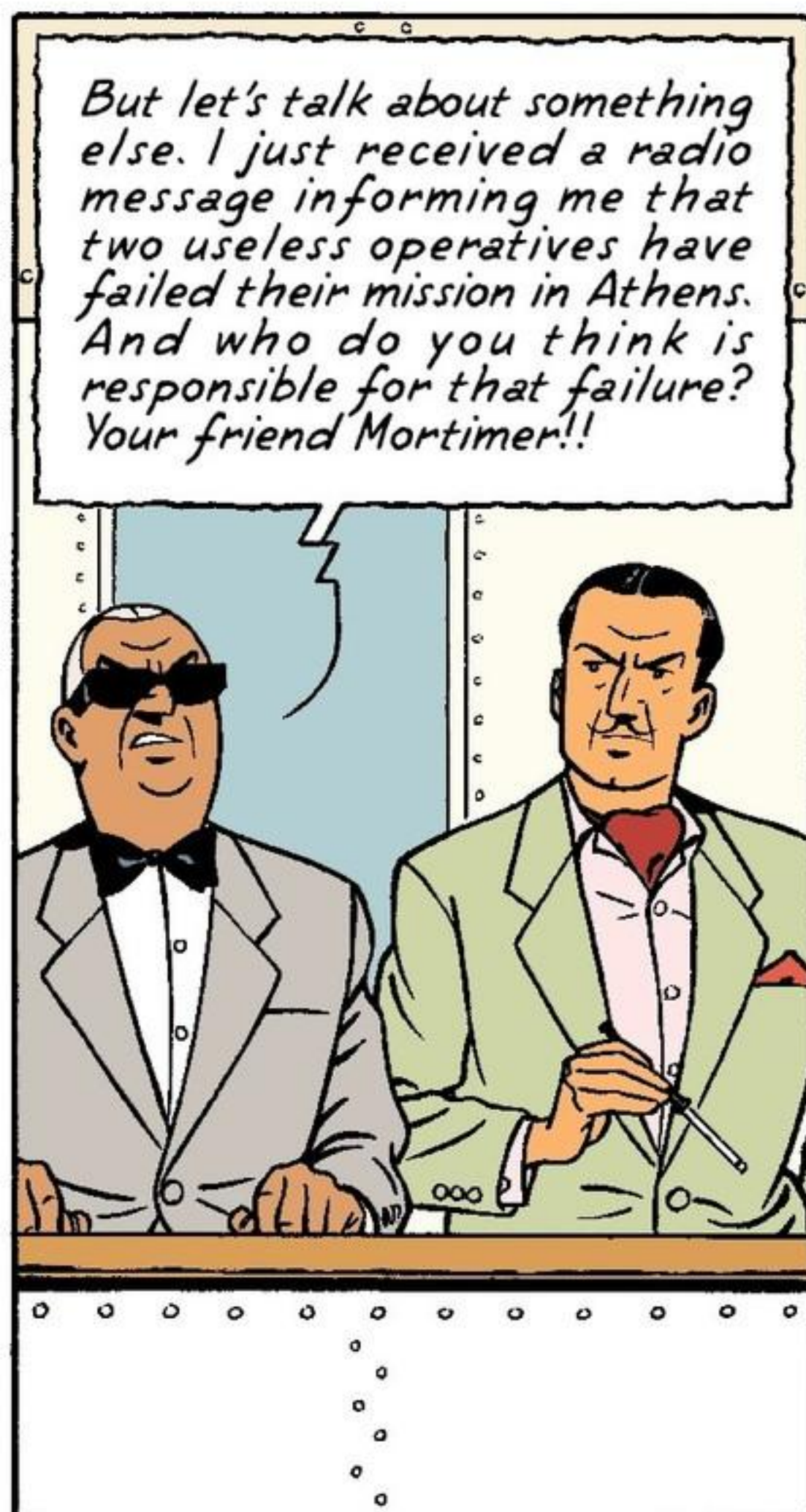
That, Francis, old buddy, is the \$64,000 question.

*"DEATH'S HEAD" 3RD SS ARMOUR DIVISION
**PRISONER CAMP FOR ENLISTED MEN AND NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS

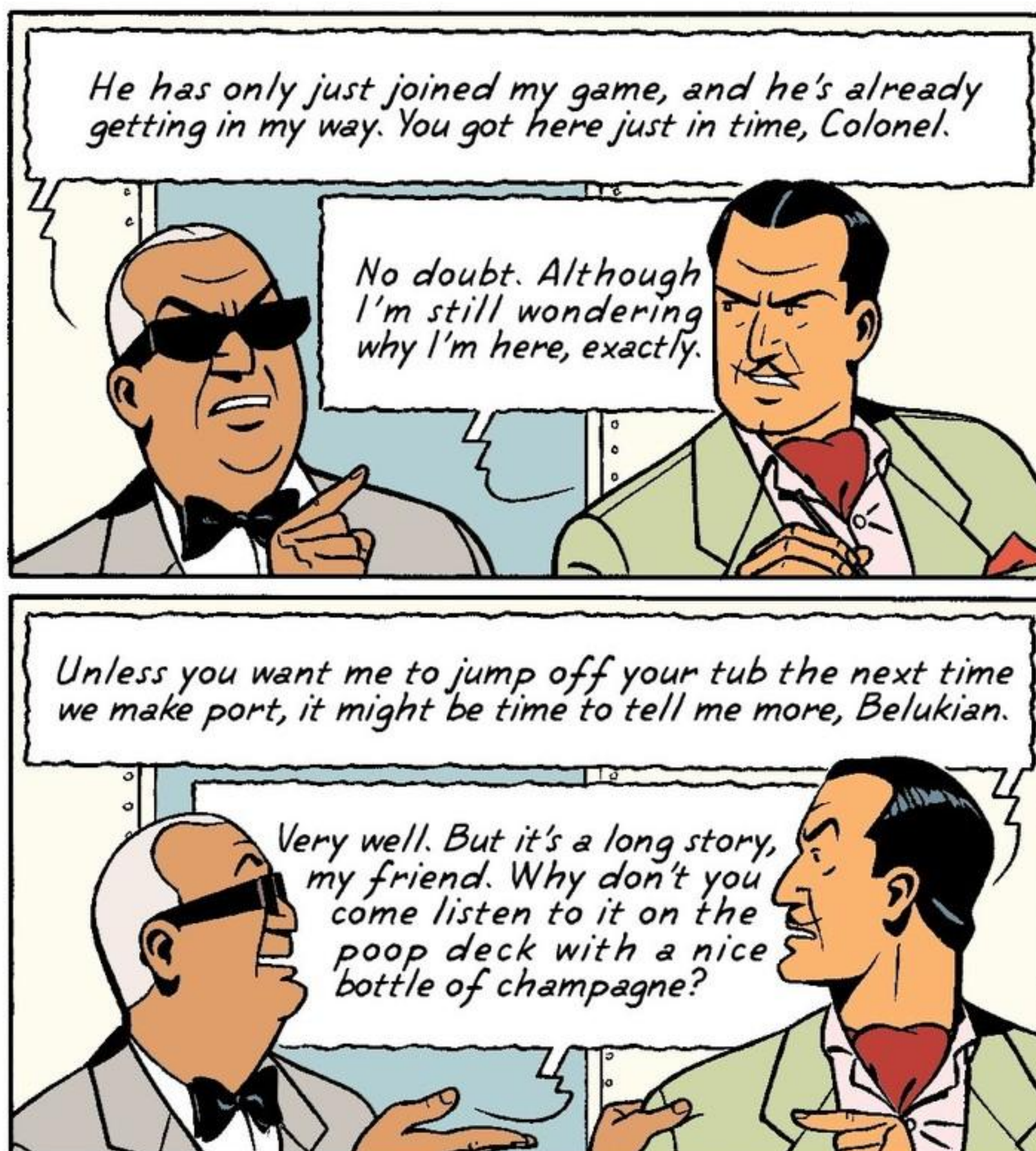


Impressive, isn't it?

The Rock of Gibraltar. Symbol of British arrogance, stuck like a needle in the side of a foreign land. I hate the British, Colonel.



But let's talk about something else. I just received a radio message informing me that two useless operatives have failed their mission in Athens. And who do you think is responsible for that failure? Your friend Mortimer!!

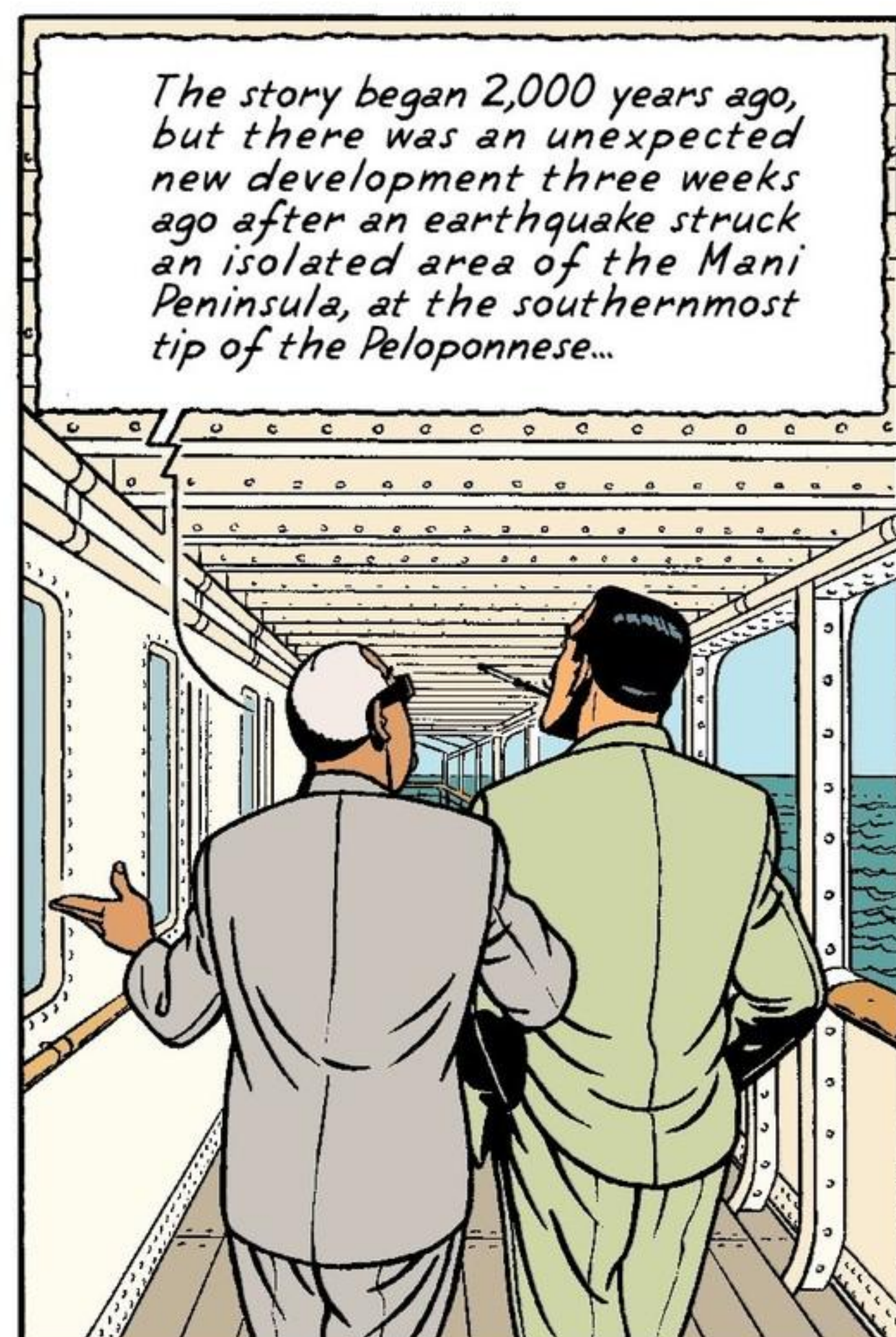


He has only just joined my game, and he's already getting in my way. You got here just in time, Colonel.

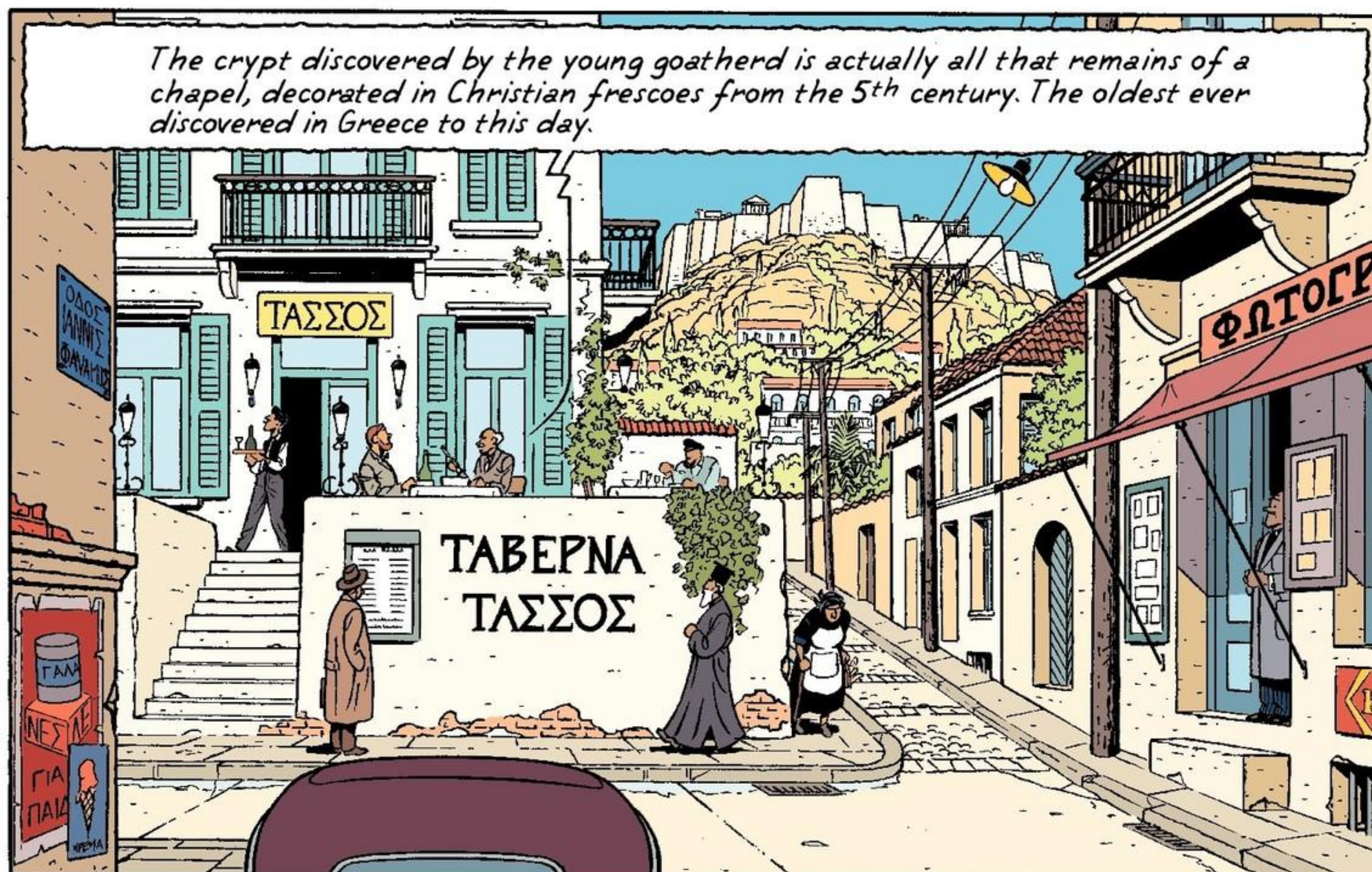
No doubt. Although I'm still wondering why I'm here, exactly.

Unless you want me to jump off your tub the next time we make port, it might be time to tell me more, Belukian.

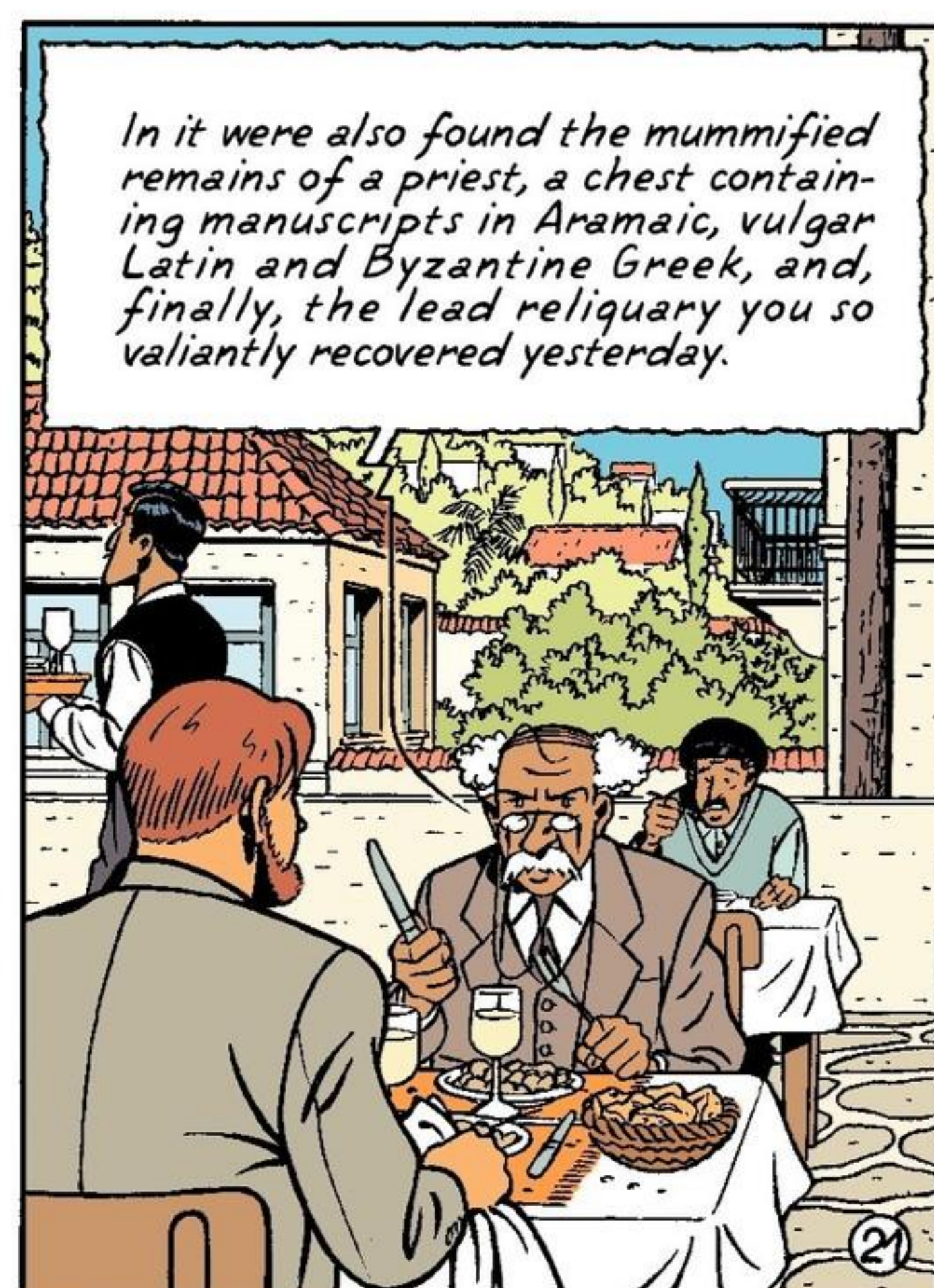
Very well. But it's a long story, my friend. Why don't you come listen to it on the poop deck with a nice bottle of champagne?



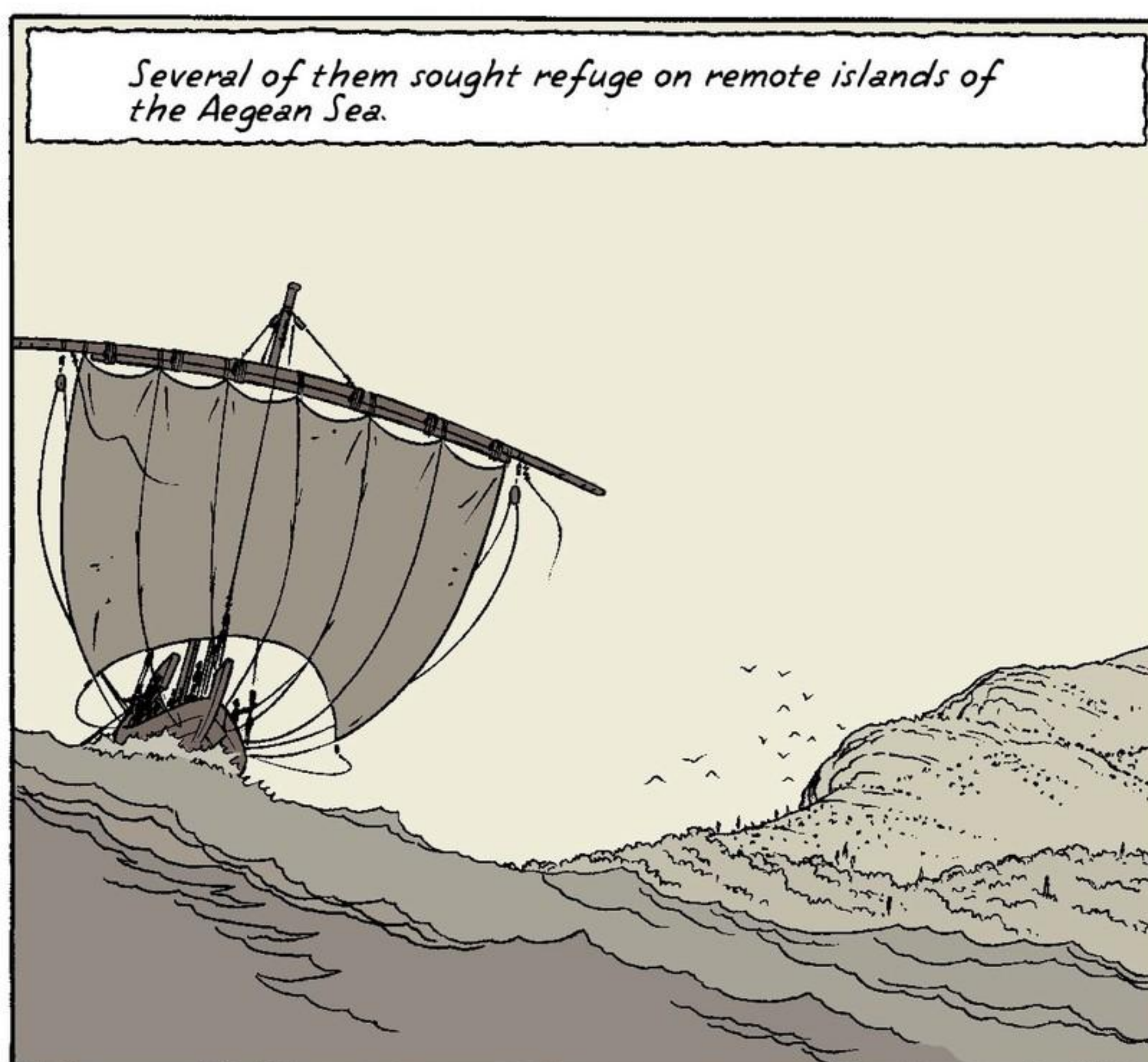
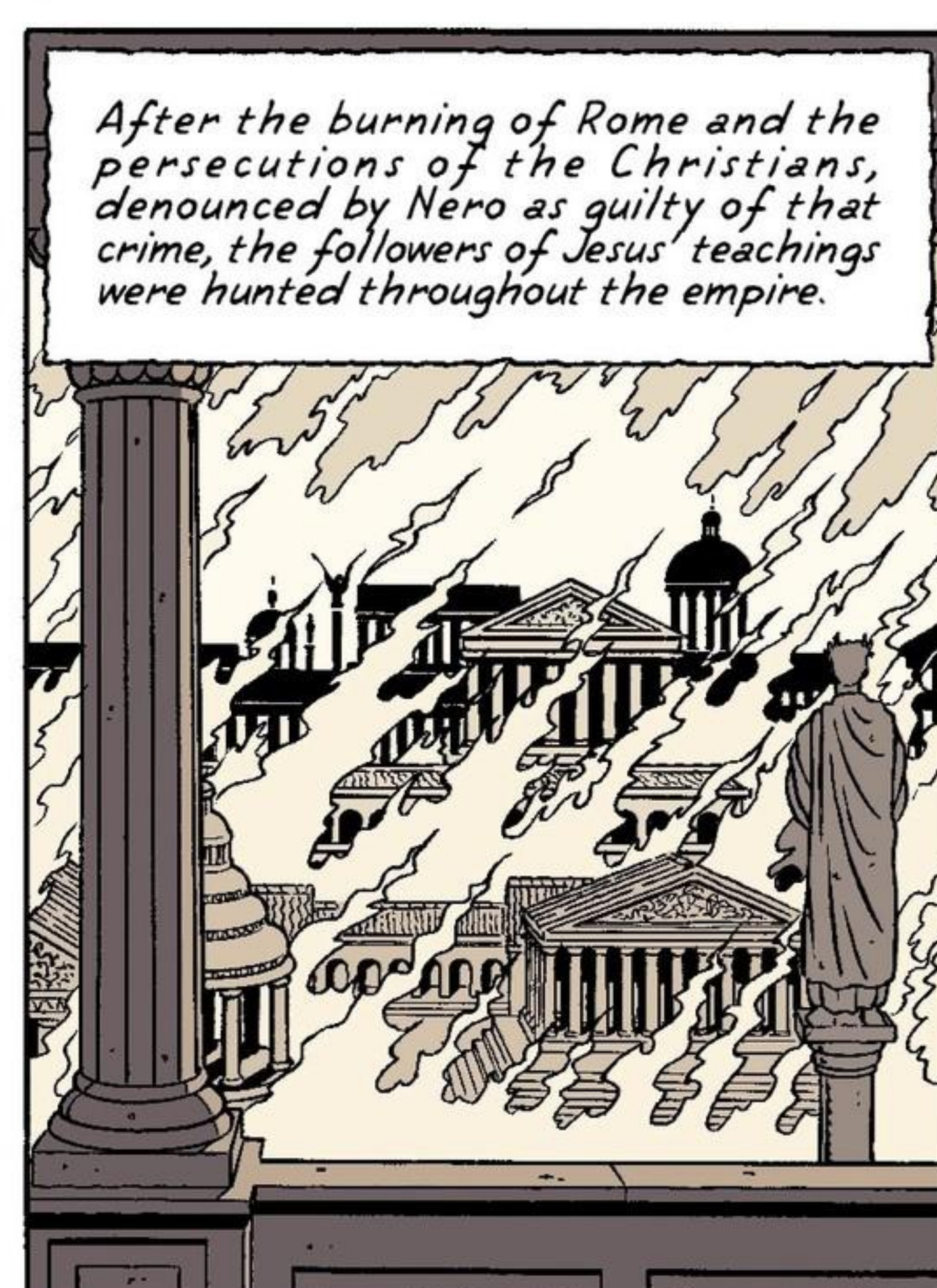
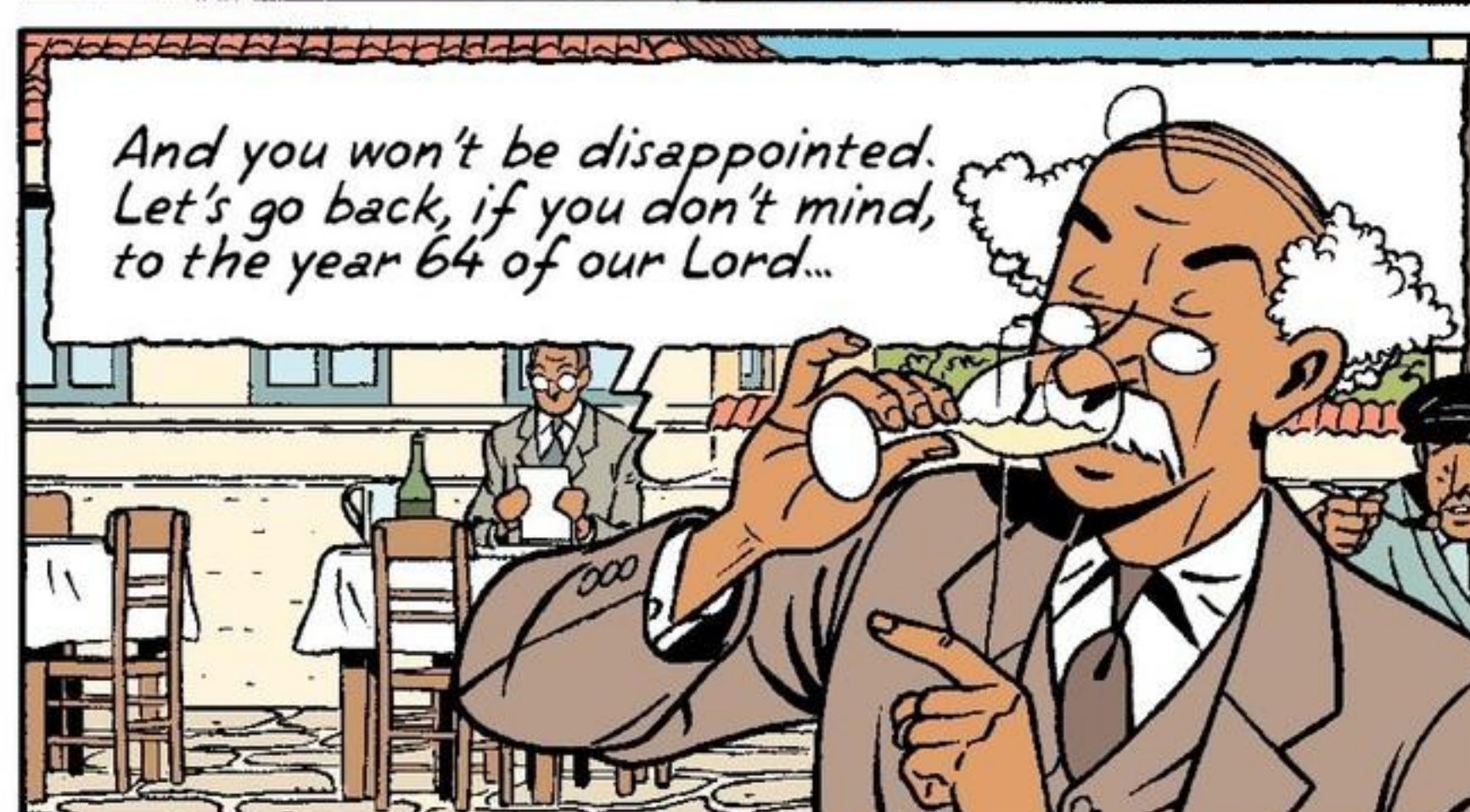
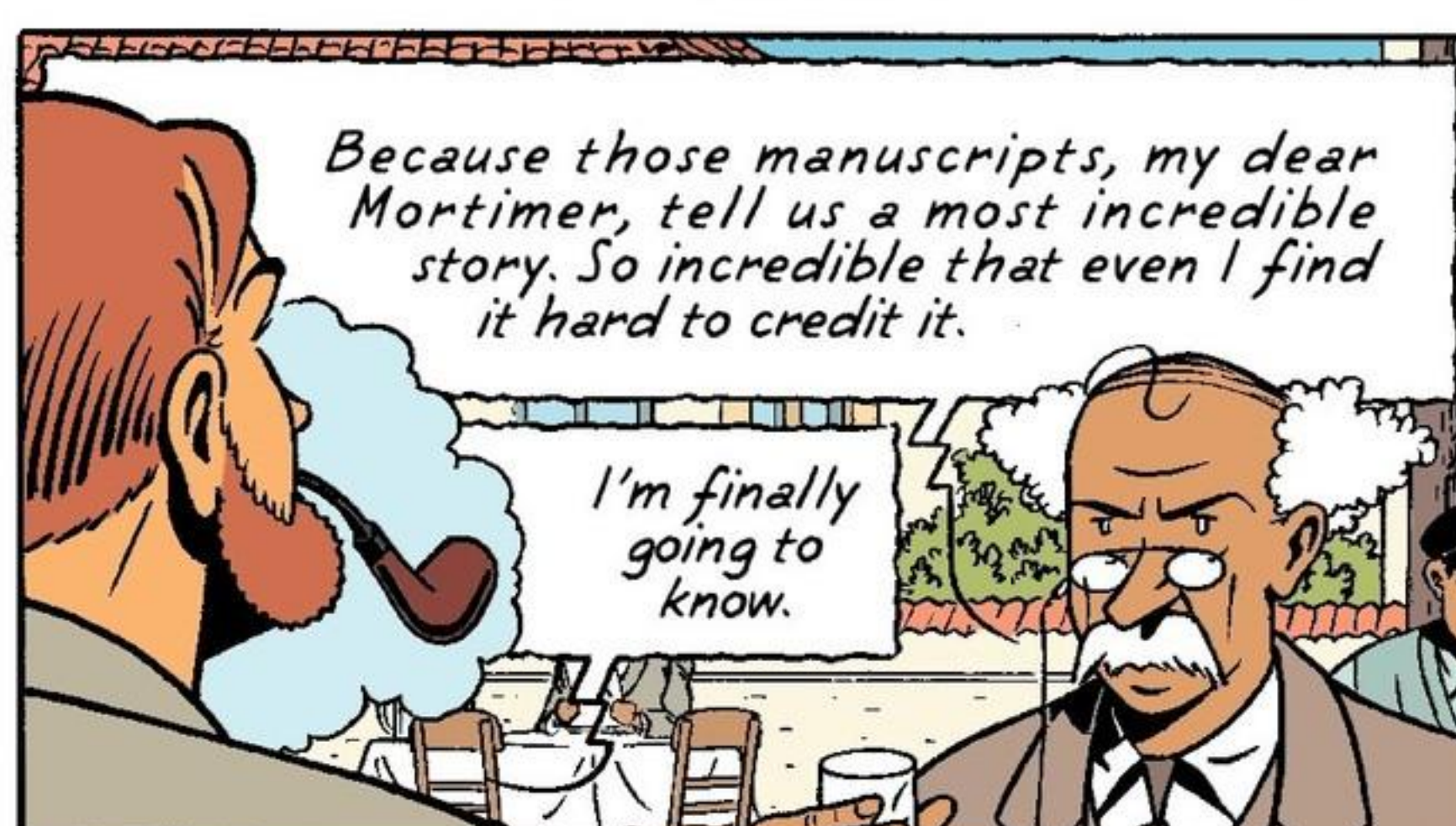
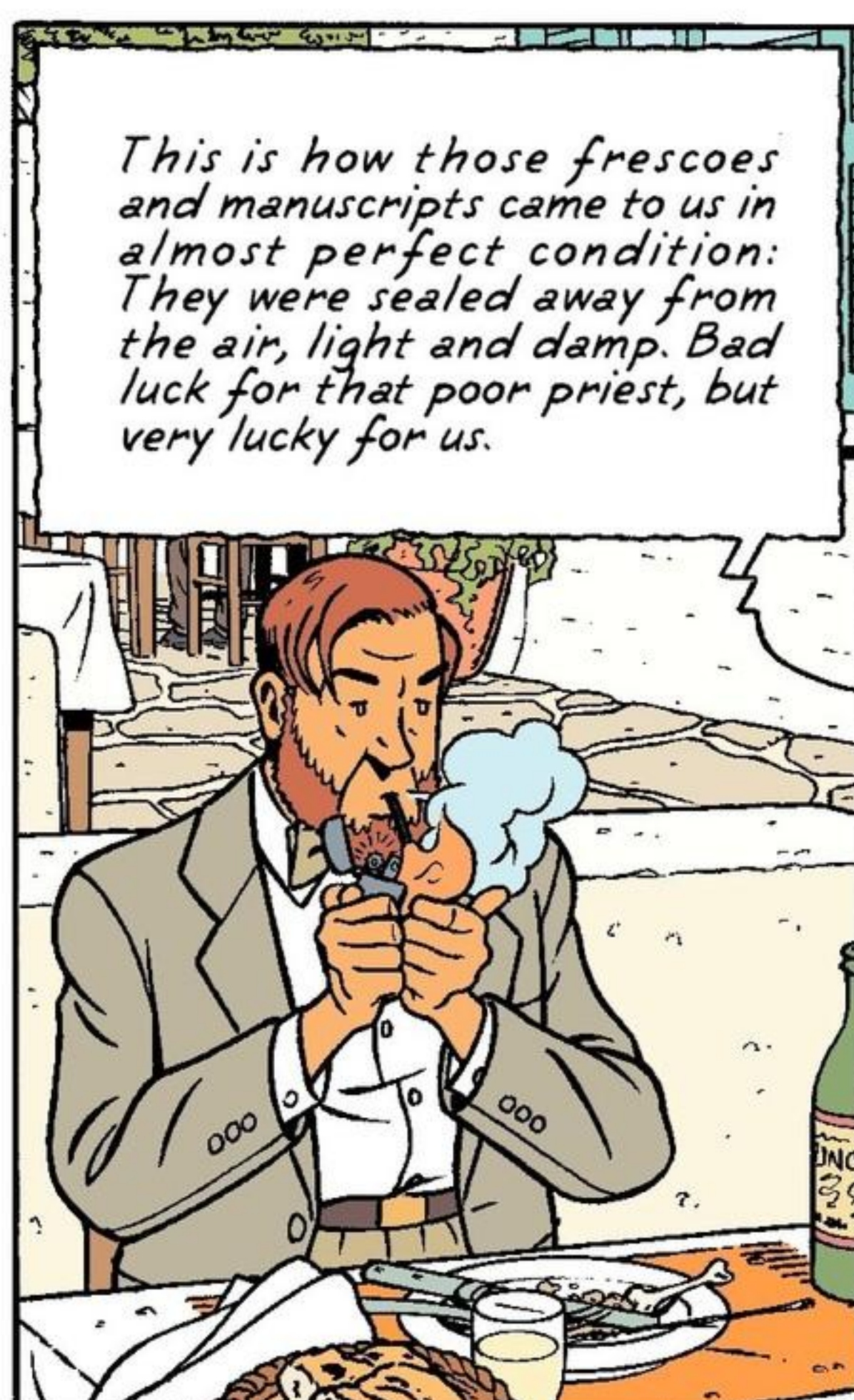
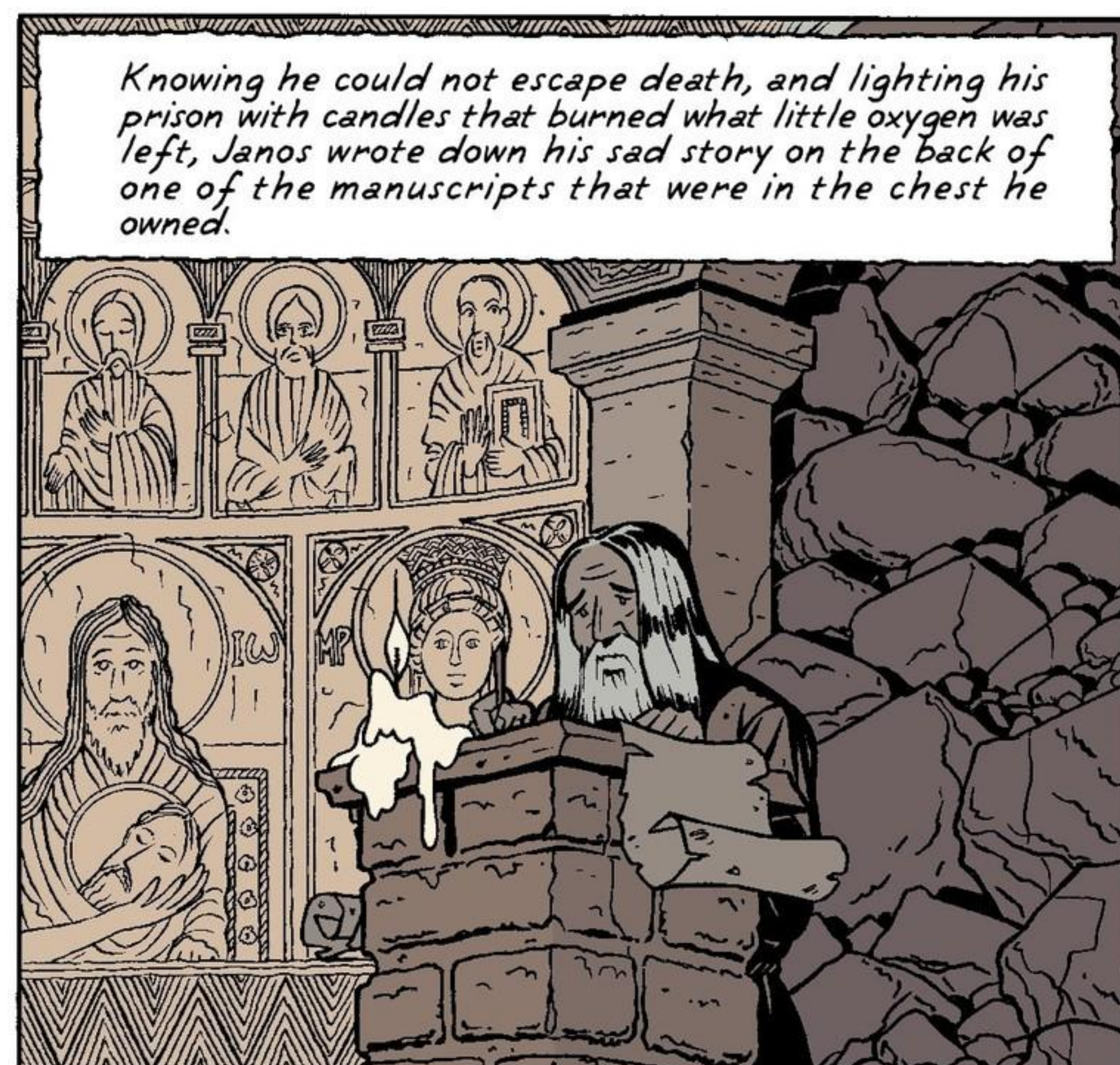
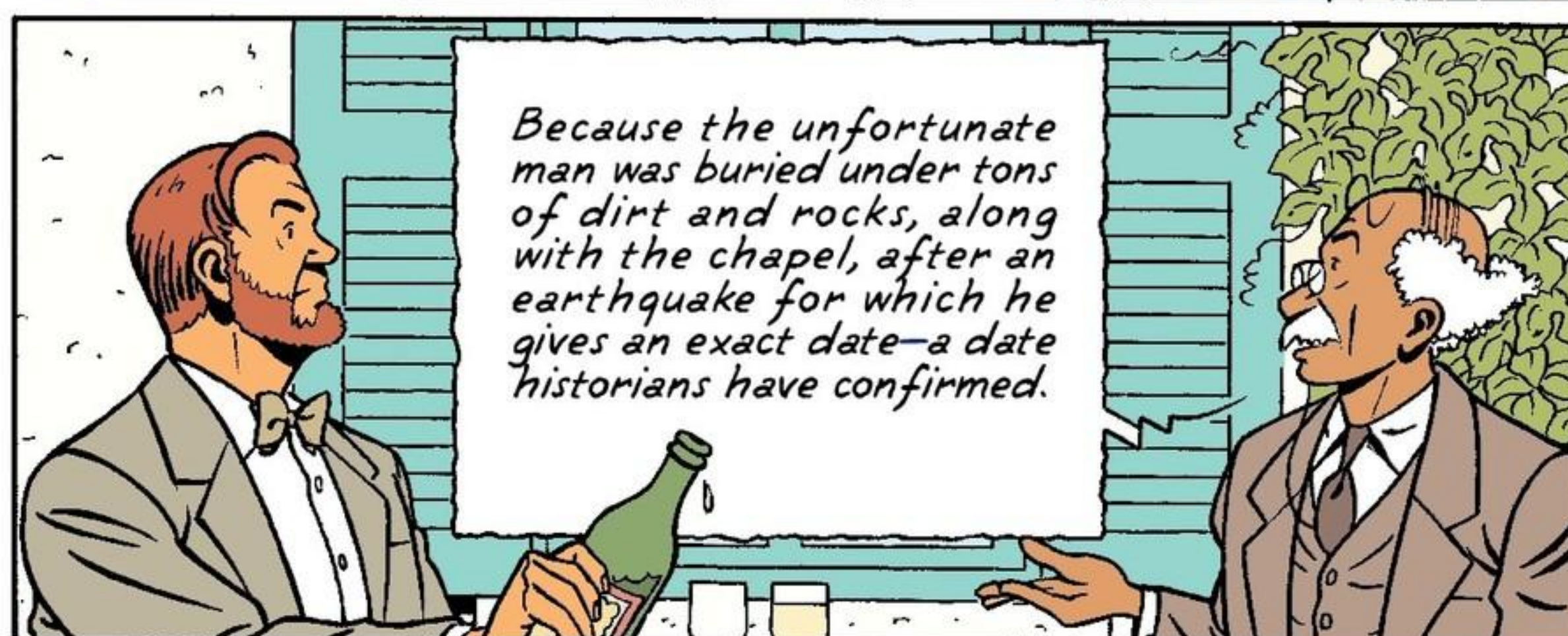
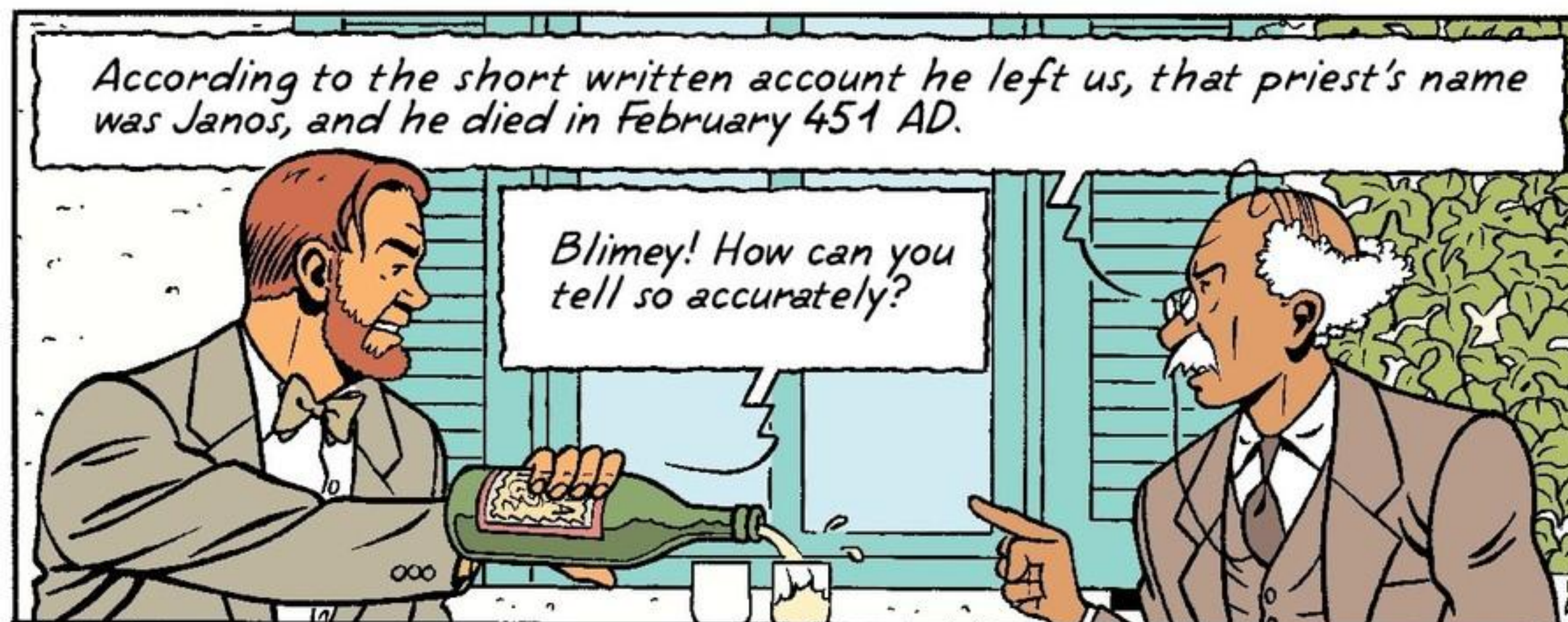
The story began 2,000 years ago, but there was an unexpected new development three weeks ago after an earthquake struck an isolated area of the Mani Peninsula, at the southernmost tip of the Peloponnese...



The crypt discovered by the young goatherd is actually all that remains of a chapel, decorated in Christian frescoes from the 5th century. The oldest ever discovered in Greece to this day.



In it were also found the mummified remains of a priest, a chest containing manuscripts in Aramaic, vulgar Latin and Byzantine Greek, and, finally, the lead reliquary you so valiantly recovered yesterday.



Outcasts now, the members of the small congregation lived by fishing and gathering, while their leader recounted their story on leather scrolls. In Aramaic, the Christ's language, which Roman spies would be unable to read.



One day, some 20 years after their arrival, the followers of Jesus found an exhausted, very old man at the ground-level entrance of the cave.



His wasted body covered in rags, his only baggage was a goatskin purse tied to the rope he used for a belt. He claimed to be a Christian, and close to the end of his long existence. Filled with compassion, Nicodemus welcomed him into his small community.



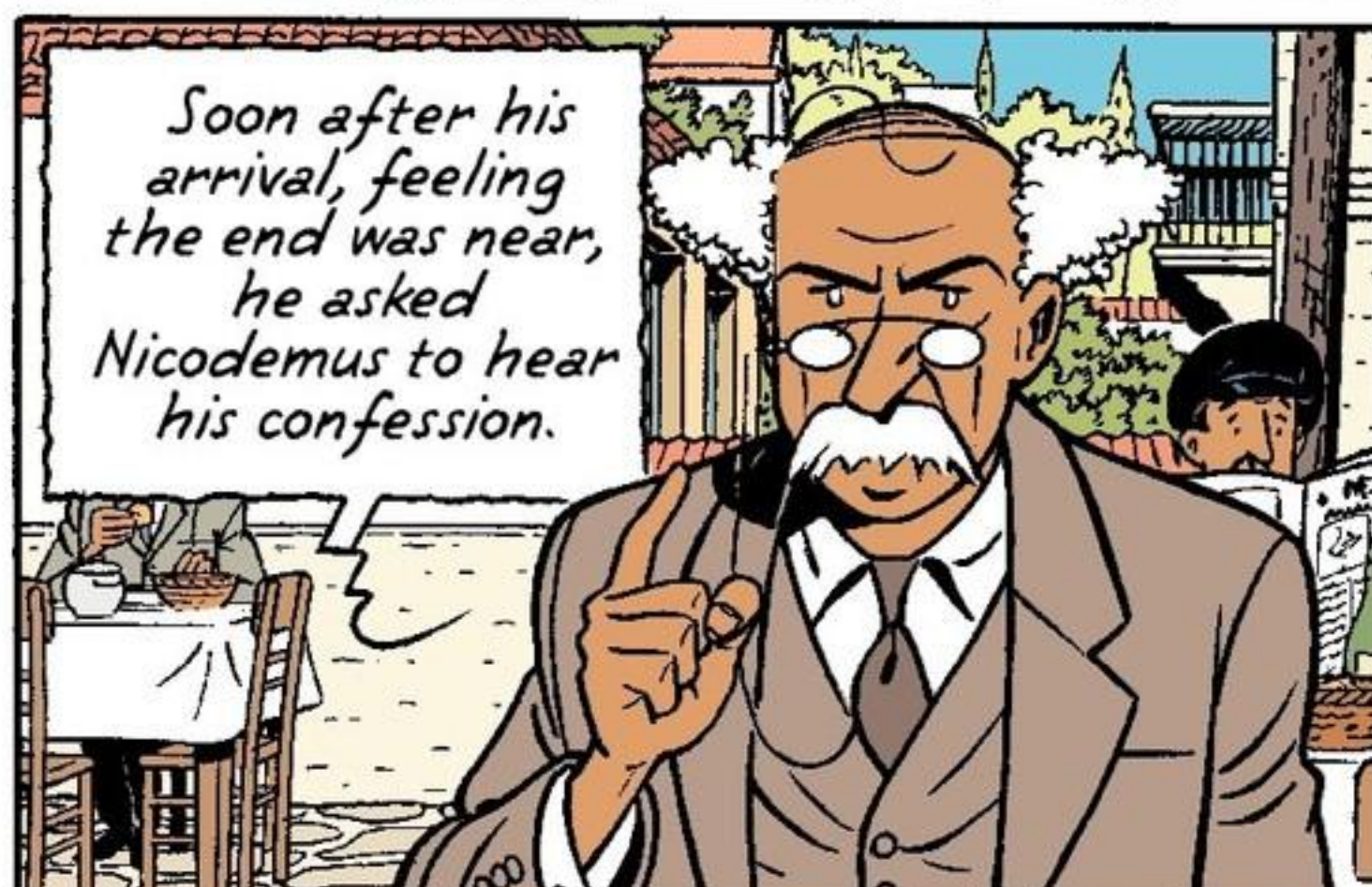
The old man, who hadn't given a name, stayed prostrate and apart from the group, only following from afar the prayers of Jesus' disciples...



... and weeping bitterly every time the name of the Nazarene was pronounced.



Soon after his arrival, feeling the end was near, he asked Nicodemus to hear his confession.



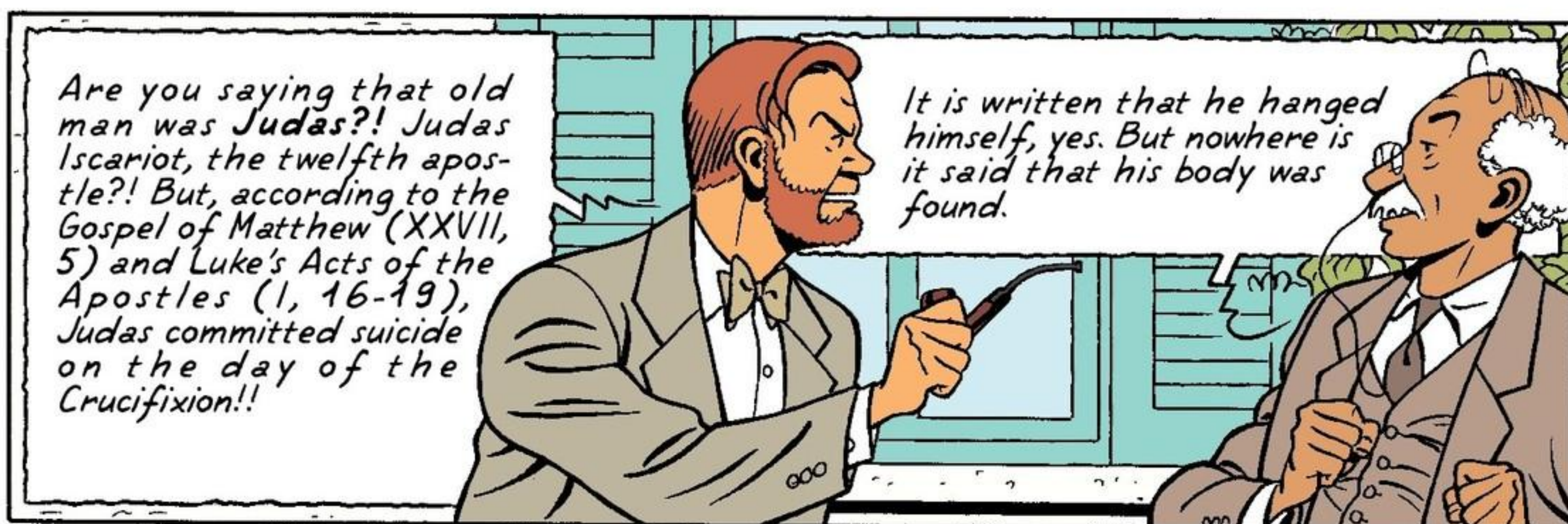
He said he had committed the most heinous of crimes. For, at the instigation of the high priests of the Temple of Jerusalem, he had betrayed the Saviour to the Romans for 30 pieces of silver.

What?!?...



Are you saying that old man was Judas?! Judas Iscariot, the twelfth apostle?! But, according to the Gospel of Matthew (XXVII, 5) and Luke's Acts of the Apostles (I, 16-19), Judas committed suicide on the day of the Crucifixion!!

It is written that he hanged himself, yes. But nowhere is it said that his body was found.



For more than 50 years, the wretch wandered around the Mediterranean, from Palestine to Phoenicia, from Syria to Cappadocia, until he ended up on that lost island, the last stop of his ordeal.



According to what he confessed to Nicodemus as he died, the rope he wanted to hang himself with snapped, for God wanted him to live to expiate his terrible treason. The same rope he'd been using as a belt ever since.



During that half century, he ate only roots and wild berries. For, everywhere he went, the disgusted people refused the denarii he offered in payment for his food, as if the weight of his sin surrounded him with a bloody aura of death.



After the old man passed away with one last sob, Nicodemus did find in his purse, untouched and unspent, 30 silver pieces bearing the profile of Emperor Tiberius.



Remember that Roman coins were the official currency of occupied Palestine, and that Tiberius reigned from to 14 to 37 AD.

Like that copy of a stater that man tried to steal yesterday.



It's no copy, Professor. The coin you brought back to me is an authentic stater from the early years of our era that has kept its lustre. And if we are to believe Nicodemus, it could, indeed, be one of the 30 denarii paid to Judas for denouncing Jesus to Procurator Pontius Pilatus.



TEMPORARILY SHAKEN, MORTIMER GATHERS HIS WITS ABOUT HIM AGAIN.

Come now, Dr Markopoulos. What you're telling me is all myth. That the stater be authentic, I'm willing to accept. But from there, to think that it could be one of the infamous 30 pieces of silver...

Do not mock, my incredulous friend. Rather, listen to the rest of Nicodemus's story...



Horried by what he'd heard from the lips of the dying man, the leader of the congregation commissioned one of his flock, a young Judean Jew named Yadin, to go bury the body as far away as possible, in a place that must remain a secret from all. And, most importantly, to bury him with his purse, without removing a single coin.



Yadin left the cave that night, taking the body of the old man on a small boat.



When he came back three months later, he was unrecognisable, disfigured. A devastating leprosy was making his flesh rot. His mouth and tongue were so ravaged that he was no longer able to utter any intelligible words.



In vain, Nicodemus questioned him about where he had buried the man who'd confessed to being Judas Iscariot. A few days later, the unfortunate young man passed away in terrible pain.



It was then that Nicodemus found on his body one of the pieces of silver. Poor Yadin hadn't been able to resist the temptation to take it from the purse before burying the body. At that moment, he understood that the old man he'd taken in truly was the traitor apostle, and that God's curse had been placed on the payment received for his betrayal.



Still, unwilling simply to get rid of that denarius, which represented the blood of Christ, he locked it inside a lead reliquary and forbade that it ever be opened again. The same reliquary that resurfaced three weeks ago in that chapel in the Mani Peninsula.

This is where Nicodemus's story ends.

So, you don't know where the grave of this so-called Judas is?

No. But Nicodemus may have lied to mislead those who would read his writings. Yadin may have spoken after all... or written.

In that case, Nicodemus may have left a clue in his cave. What island is it on?

Another mystery. Eleni and I believe that the first part of Nicodemus's manuscripts is missing, for his story begins rather abruptly. I will show you later, back at the museum.

I must confess I can't wait to see it. And to have a closer look at that stater.

About this, my dear professor, I urge you to show the greatest of care...

It seems that the silver piece has brought terrible luck to all who possessed it throughout the centuries, as if it were imbued with an evil power. Which is why I prefer keeping it locked up in my safe.

Come now, Dr Markopoulos. I understand how affecting such a discovery can be, but this is no more than superstition. As scientists, it's our duty to...

BANG **???**

BANG **?**

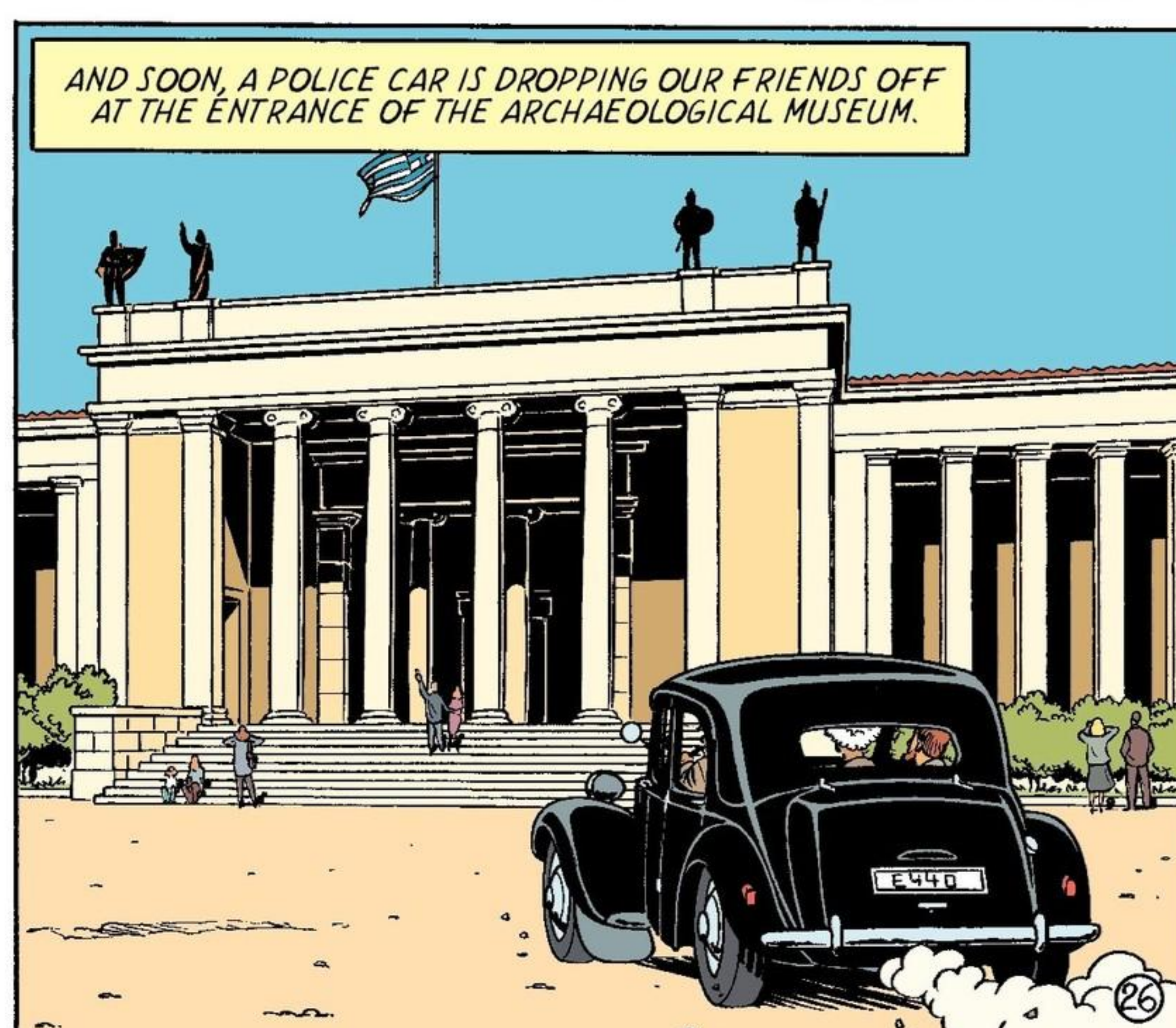
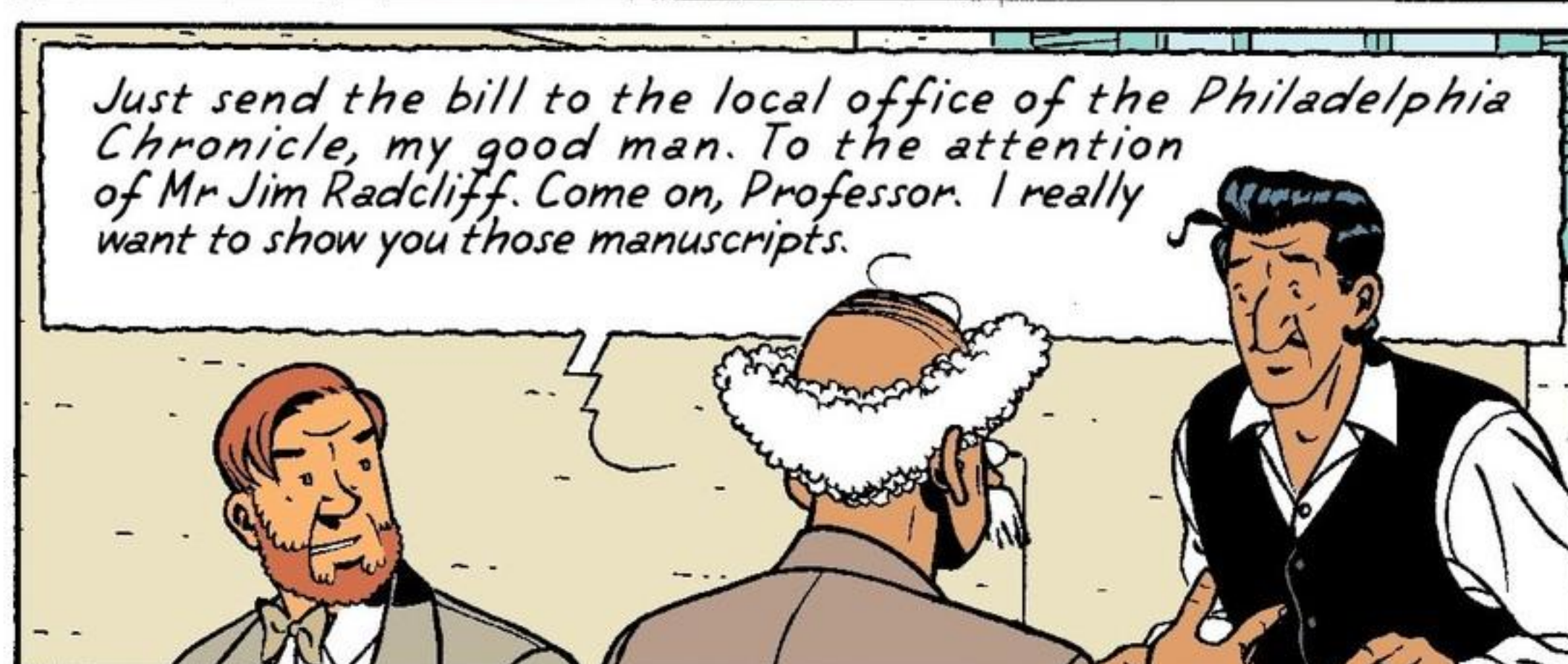
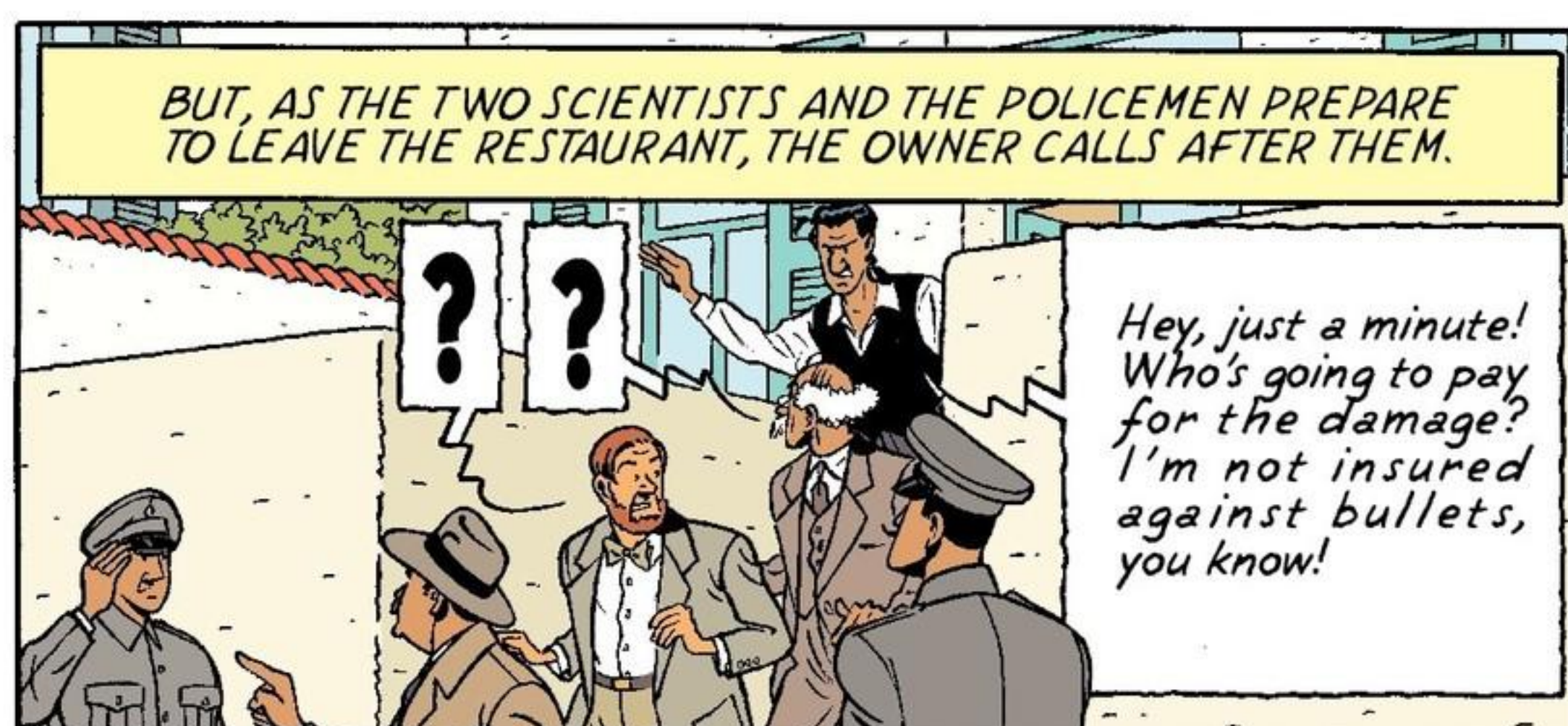
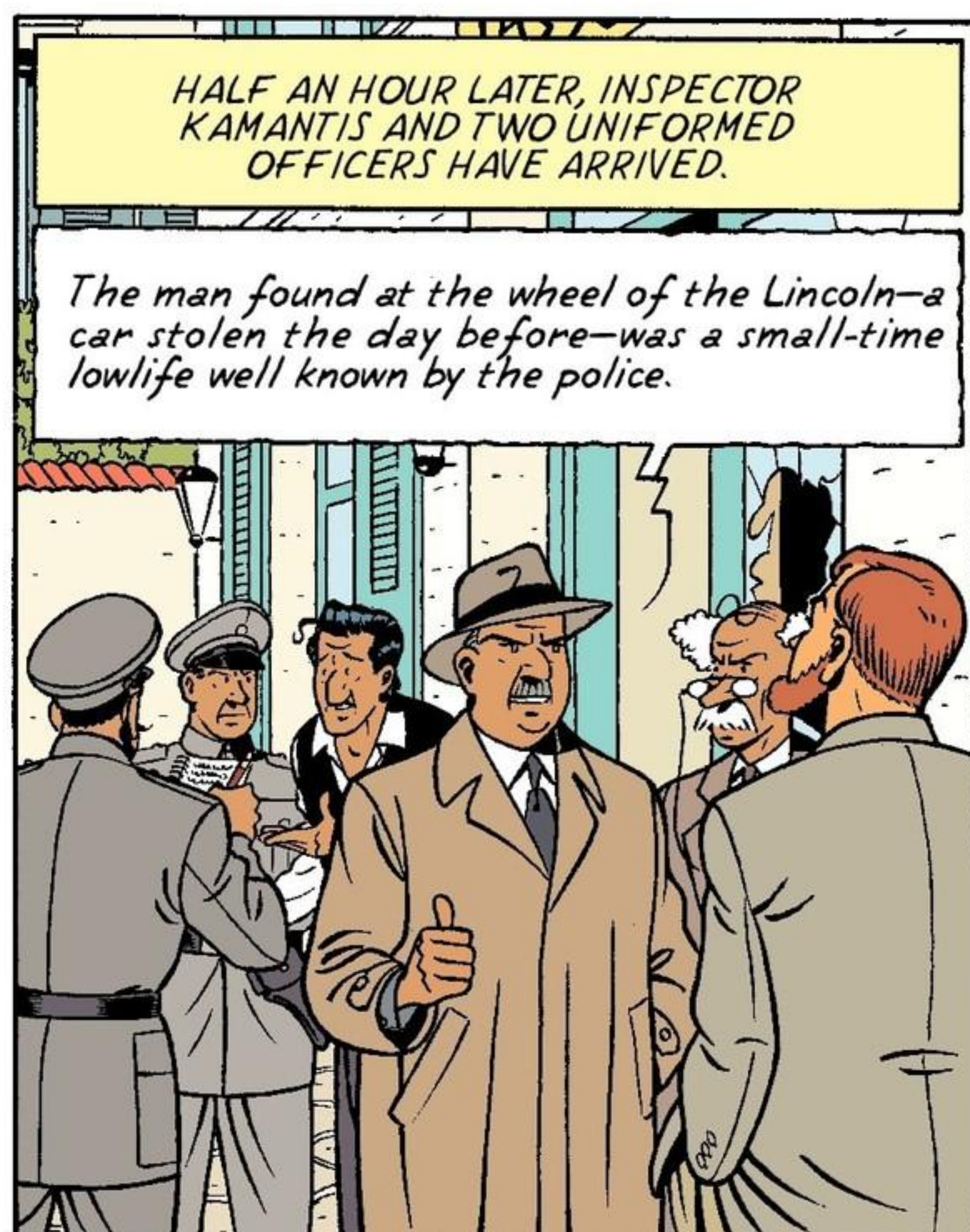
BANG **BANG**

What on earth?...

BANG

ZING

BANG 25



THE TWO MEN HAVING JOINED ELENI IN THE CURATOR'S OFFICE, THE LATTER EXPLAINS TO HIS NIECE THE UNPLEASANT ADVENTURE THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH.



Don't tell me after all that that you still don't believe in the denarius's curse.

Please, Doctor. It's no more than an unfortunate set of coincidences. My scientific rationalism forbids me from crediting such superstitions.



By its very definition, rationalism can be an obstacle to true knowledge, Professor. Didn't our friend Rassim Bey tell me about an extraordinary adventure you had in the Chamber of Horus, in the Great Pyramid?



No more than conjecture, as I have, unfortunately, lost all memory of it. To get back to the subject at hand, would you be so kind as to show me the stater again?



Very well. But I warned you.

AFTER LOCKING HIS OFFICE DOOR AND MAKING SURE THE WINDOWS ARE SHUT, THE CURATOR OPENS HIS SAFE...



MORE DEEPLY MOVED THAN HE CARES TO ADMIT, MORTIMER LIFTS THE LID OF THE MYSTERIOUS RELIQUARY...



... AND CAREFULLY EXAMINES THE HEAVY SILVER COIN, ONE SIDE OF WHICH SHOWS THE RIGHT PROFILE OF TIBERIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS...



... AND TAKES OUT THE SMALL LEAD CASKET, PUTTING IT DOWN ON HIS DESK.



... WHILE THE OTHER DISPLAYS LIVIA, DEIFIED WIFE OF AUGUSTUS AND MOTHER OF EMPEROR TIBERIUS, "PONTIFEX MAXIMUS*" IS IT POSSIBLE, HE CAN'T HELP BUT ASK HIMSELF, THAT HE IS REALLY HOLDING ONE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER GIVEN TO THE RENEGADE APOSTLE TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO?!

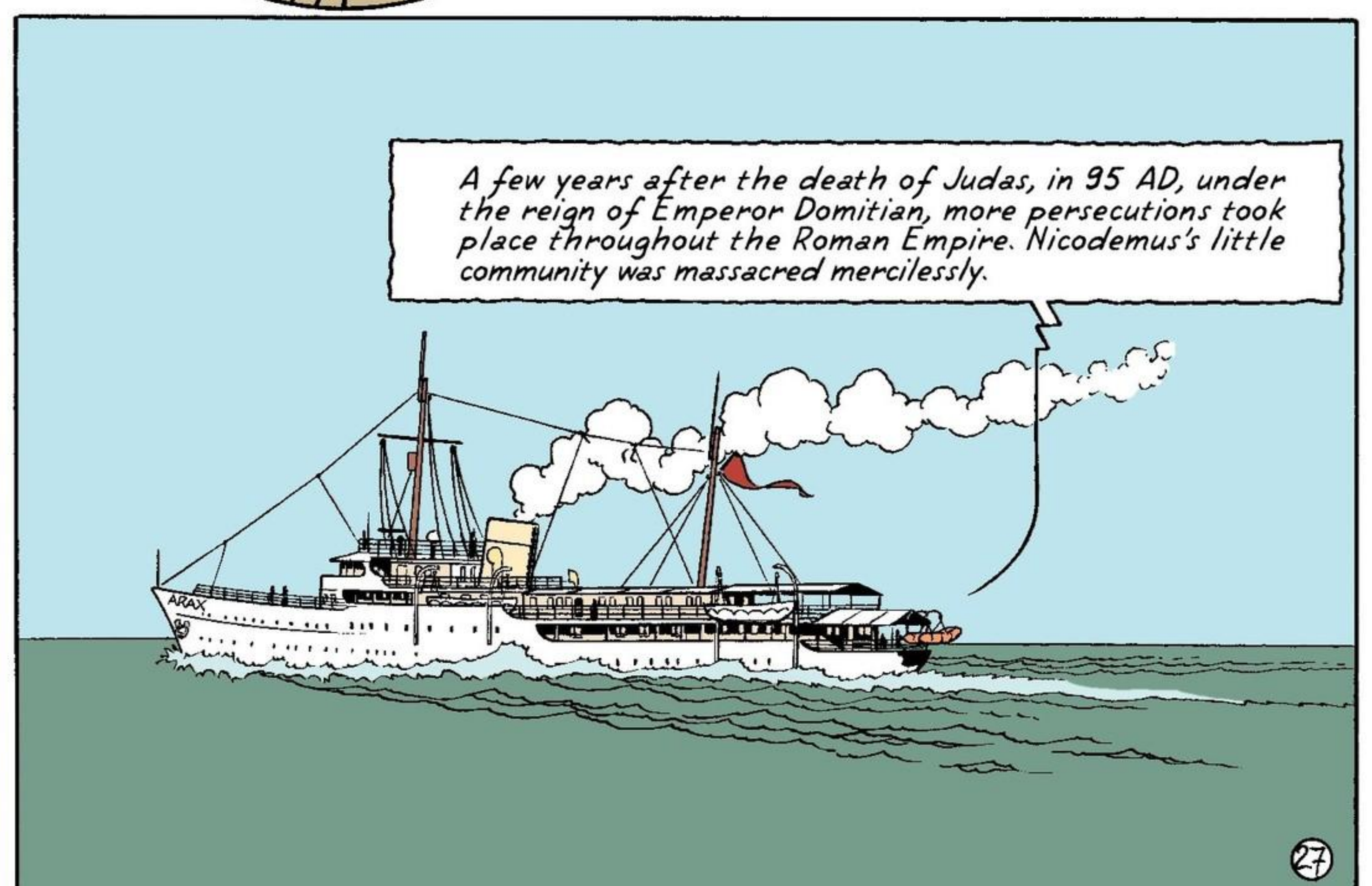


Well, you see?... The sky didn't fall on me.

Please do not joke about this. Think of that lightning that came of nowhere and struck the scoundrels who'd stolen this casket. And above all, listen to the rest of the story I was telling you at lunch...



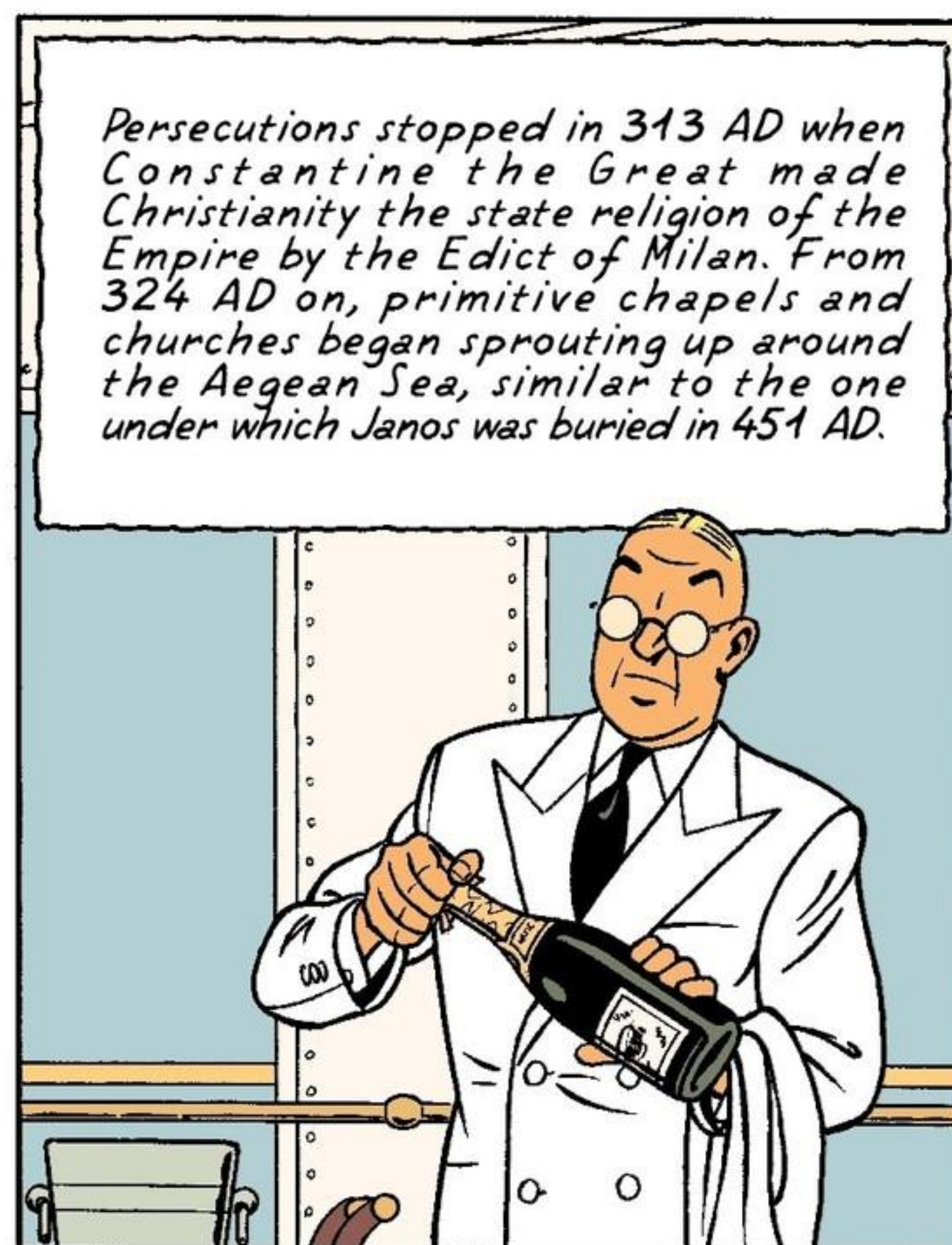
A few years after the death of Judas, in 95 AD, under the reign of Emperor Domitian, more persecutions took place throughout the Roman Empire. Nicodemus's little community was massacred mercilessly.



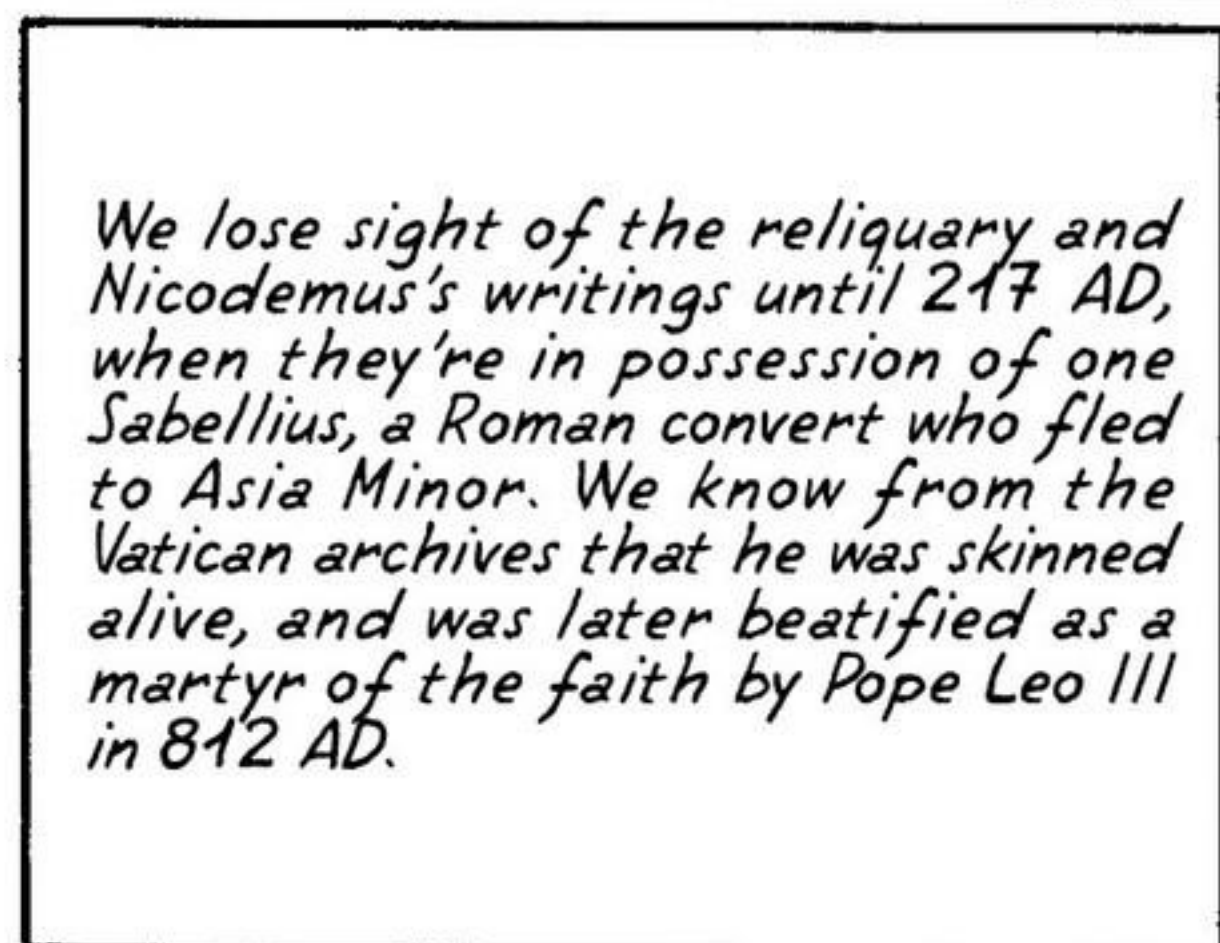
*HIGH PRIEST OF ANCIENT ROME'S COLLEGE OF PONTIFFS



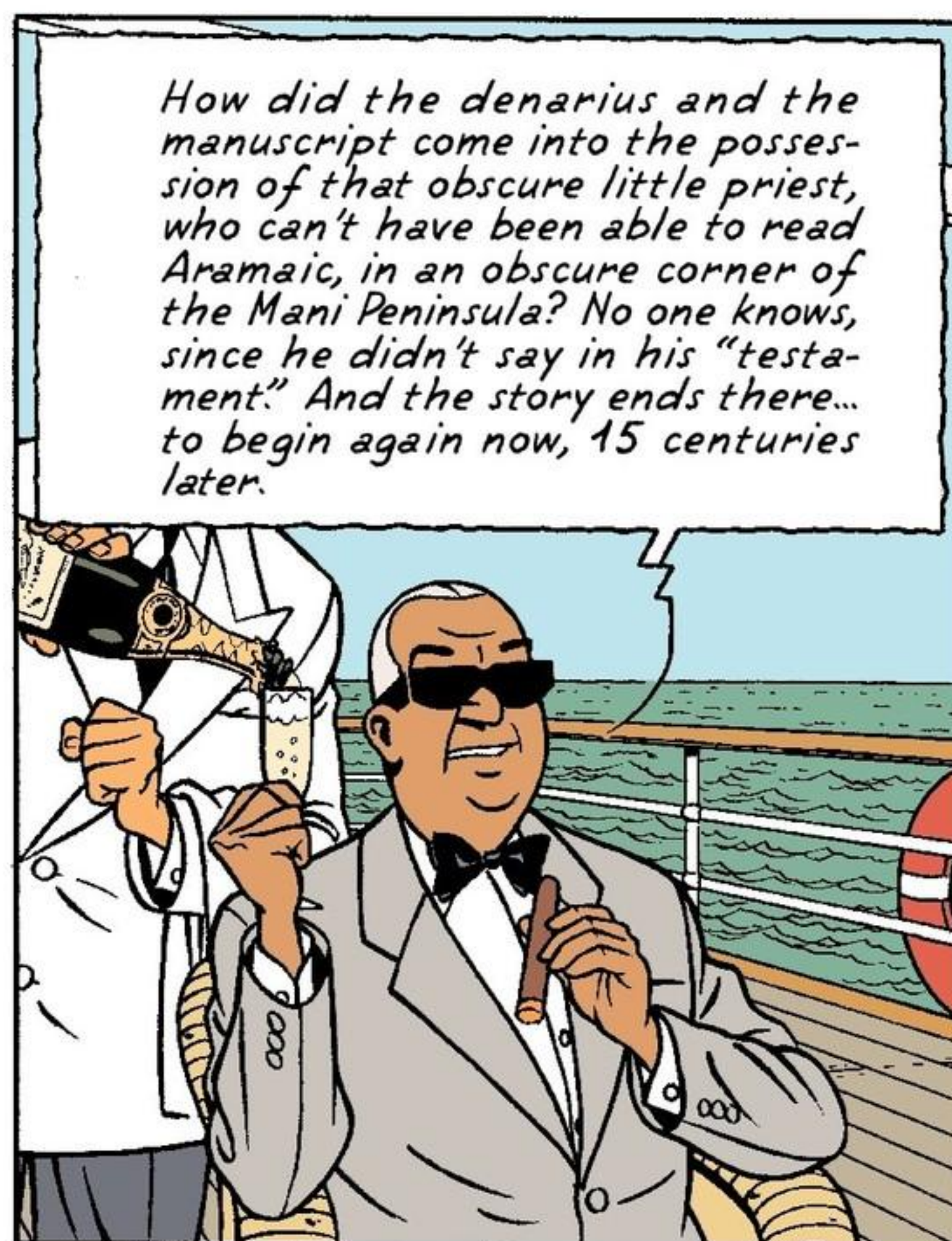
A few survivors managed to flee, taking with them their symbols of worship, including the lead casket and their patriarch's manuscript. Cast out, hunted, the Christians wandered from shelter to shelter throughout the Eastern Empire.



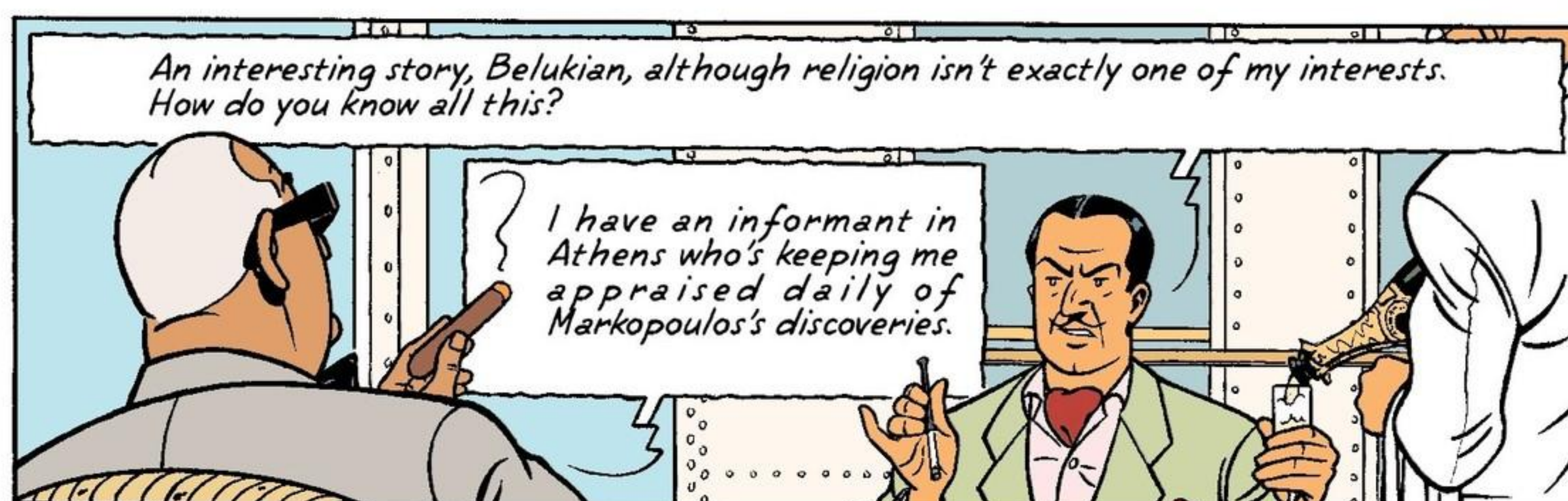
Persecutions stopped in 313 AD when Constantine the Great made Christianity the state religion of the Empire by the Edict of Milan. From 324 AD on, primitive chapels and churches began sprouting up around the Aegean Sea, similar to the one under which Janos was buried in 451 AD.



We lose sight of the reliquary and Nicodemus's writings until 217 AD, when they're in possession of one Sabellius, a Roman convert who fled to Asia Minor. We know from the Vatican archives that he was skinned alive, and was later beatified as a martyr of the faith by Pope Leo III in 812 AD.

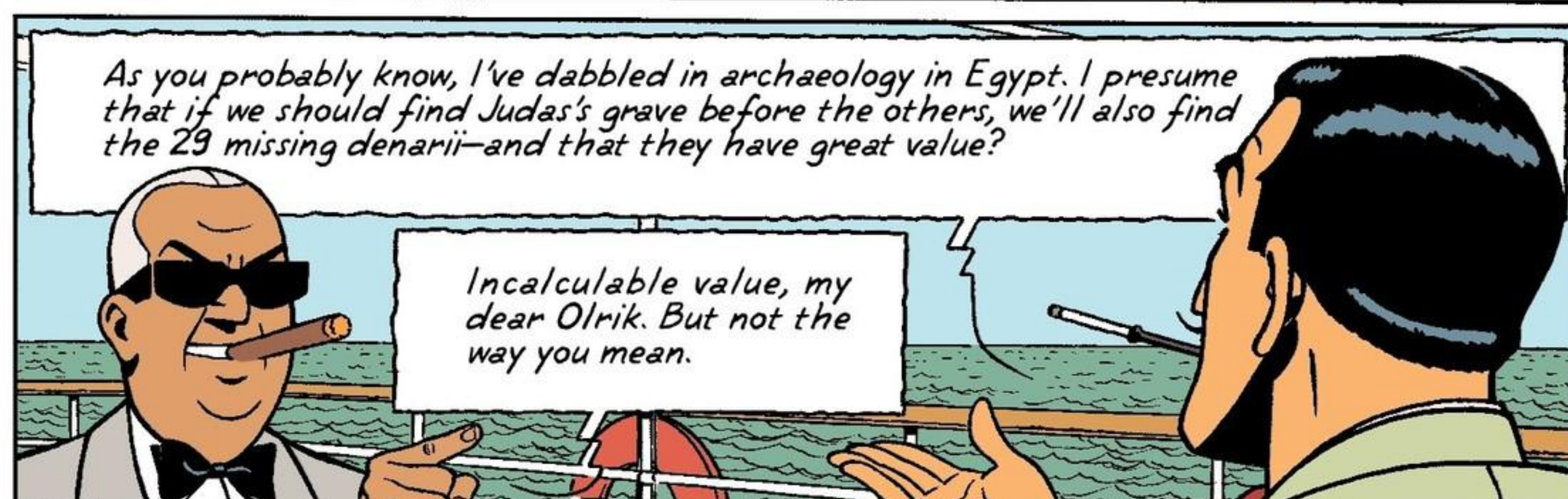


How did the denarius and the manuscript come into the possession of that obscure little priest, who can't have been able to read Aramaic, in an obscure corner of the Mani Peninsula? No one knows, since he didn't say in his "testament." And the story ends there... to begin again now, 15 centuries later.



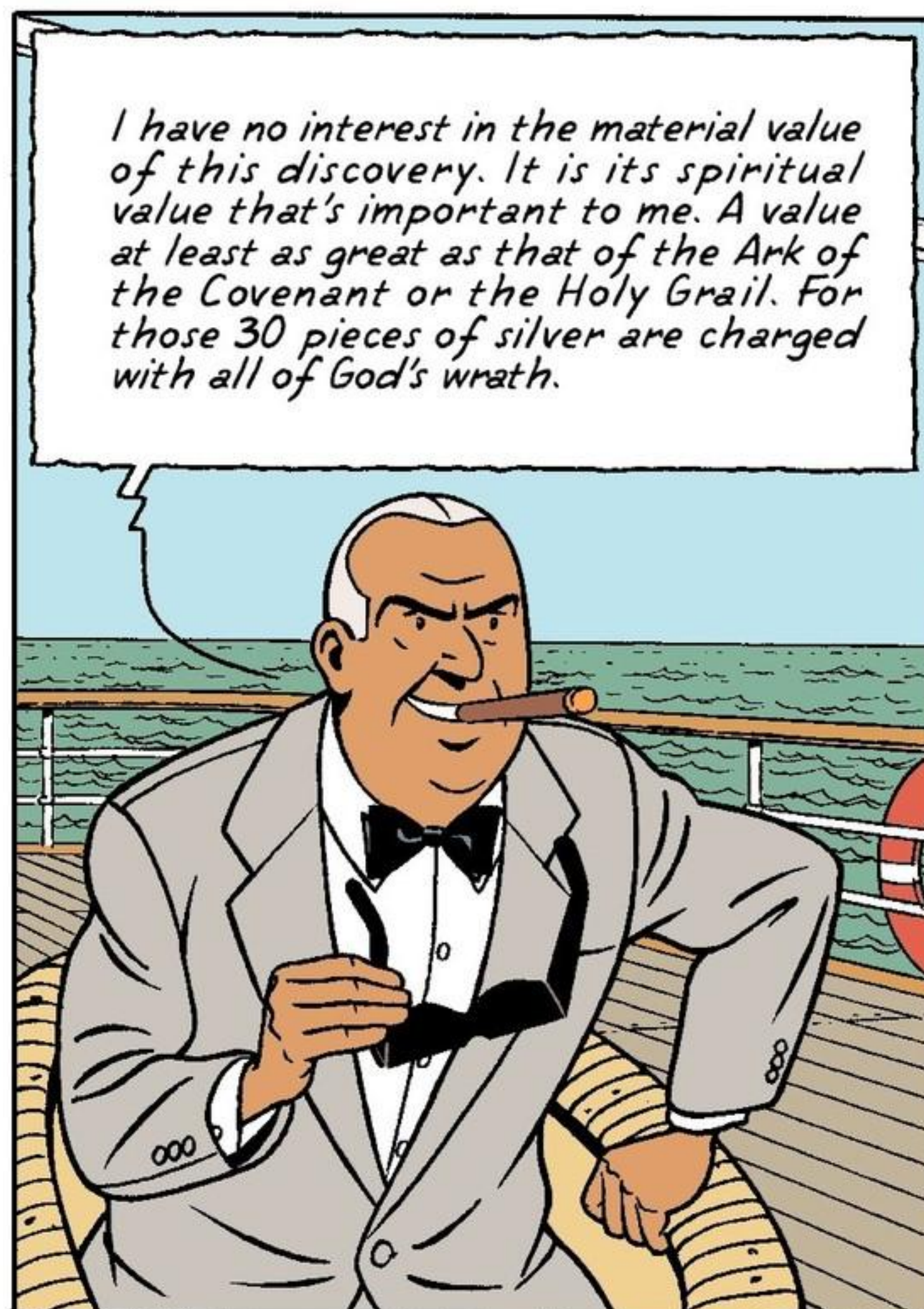
An interesting story, Belukian, although religion isn't exactly one of my interests. How do you know all this?

I have an informant in Athens who's keeping me apprised daily of Markopoulos's discoveries.

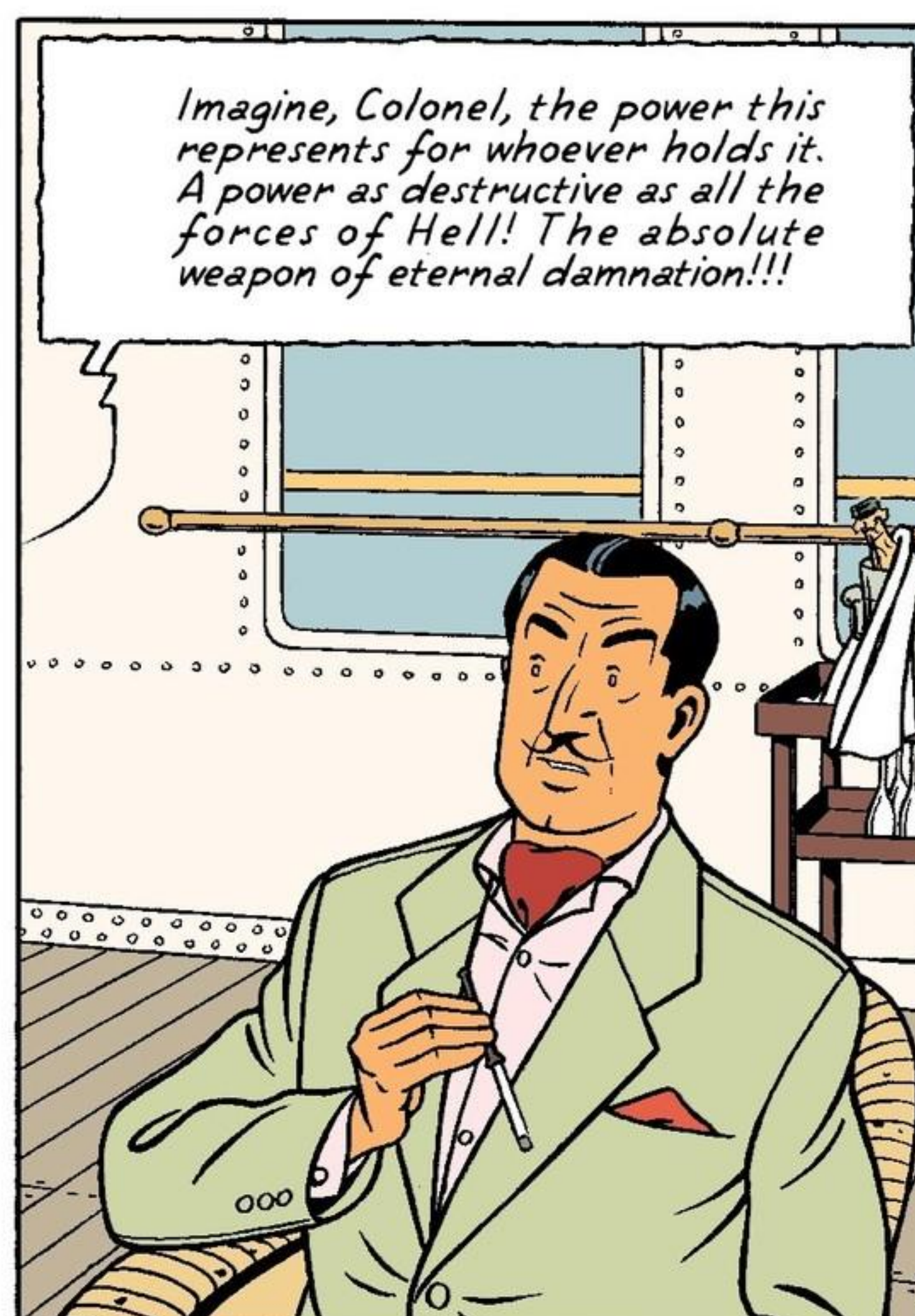


As you probably know, I've dabbled in archaeology in Egypt. I presume that if we should find Judas's grave before the others, we'll also find the 29 missing denarii—and that they have great value?

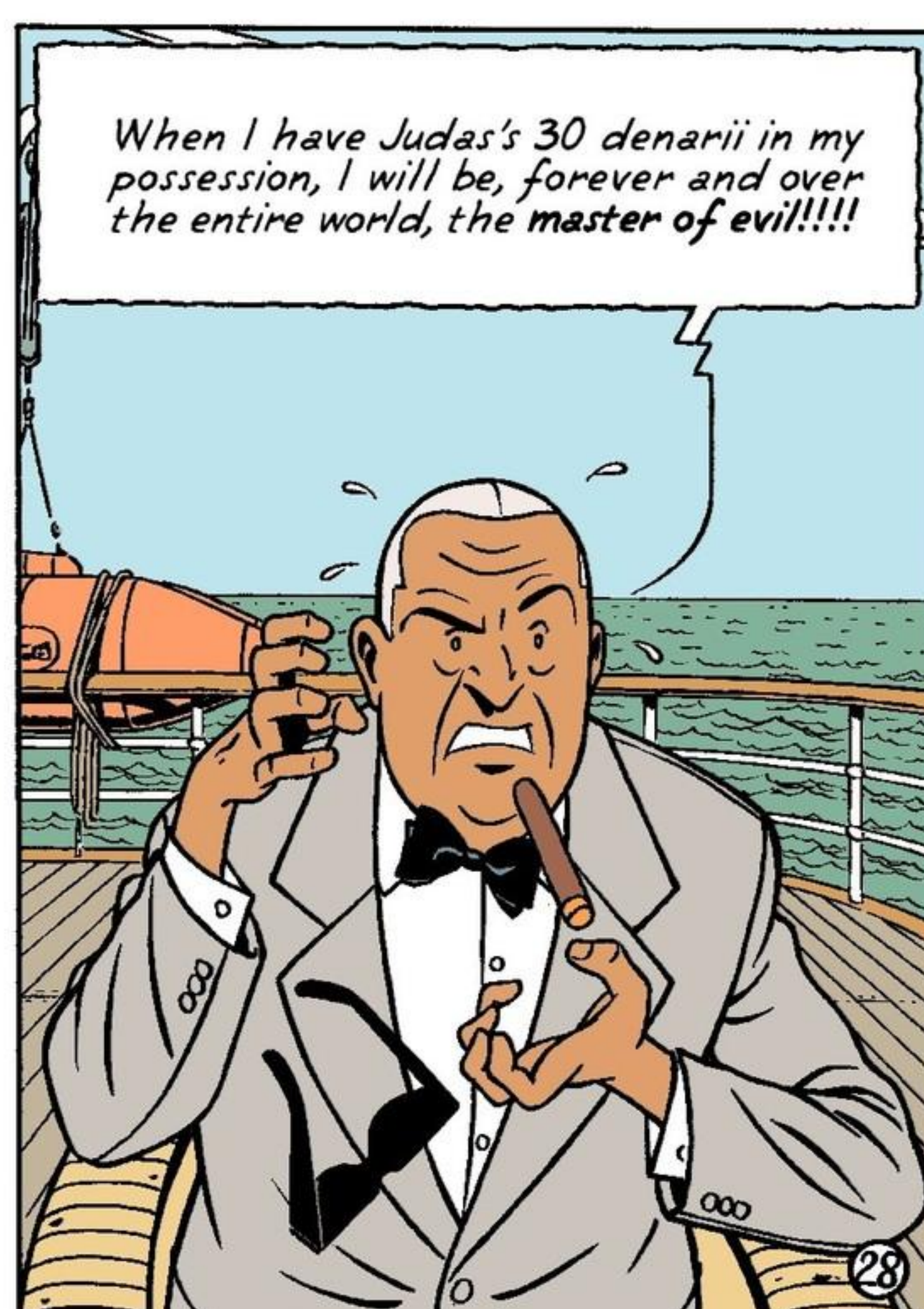
Incalculable value, my dear Olrik. But not the way you mean.



I have no interest in the material value of this discovery. It is its spiritual value that's important to me. A value at least as great as that of the Ark of the Covenant or the Holy Grail. For those 30 pieces of silver are charged with all of God's wrath.



Imagine, Colonel, the power this represents for whoever holds it. A power as destructive as all the forces of Hell! The absolute weapon of eternal damnation!!!



When I have Judas's 30 denarii in my possession, I will be, forever and over the entire world, the master of evil!!!!

MEANWHILE, MORTIMER, MARKOPOULOS AND ELENI HAVE MADE THEIR WAY TO A SMALL ROOM IN THE MUSEUM'S BASEMENT.

This is where we keep our most precious manuscripts, sheltered from light and the polluted outside air.

Fascinating!

As my uncle told you, Nicodemus wrote the history of his little community on leather scrolls with vegetable ink. I sorted them by chronological order. This is the first in the series that we have.

Do you read Aramaic, Professor?

I'm afraid my skills don't extend that far.

Then allow me to translate the beginning for you.

"... and on that sparsely populated island, we found, at last, in a vast cave with two entrances, the shelter we'd sought for two long years..."

באלין נגוא ועיר יתבין שכתב
במדאין שיזבותא דבעינא משני
מערתא רבא לחדא דהוקה לית
מסגין

What follows is the description of the cave, then the story that you now know. But the name of the island doesn't appear anywhere.

So, as the doctor told me, the first part of the manuscript is missing.

I led an archaeological team myself in a thorough search of that chapel on the Mani Peninsula. I don't believe I could have missed anything.

And yet, it's the only possible lead we have, Eleni. We have to go back.

Would you be willing to come with me, Professor?

Of course. I'm on holiday, and I have to admit I'm starting to find this mystery fascinating. Besides, didn't your uncle invite me to help you in your research?

Circumstances have changed, Professor. As long as that villain Kostas is at large, your life is in danger here. We cannot ask you to take such a risk.

Nonsense, Doctor. I've been in worse spots. We can leave for the Mani Peninsula whenever you decide.

WITH THESE BOLD WORDS, AND AFTER SAYING GOODBYE TO HIS HOSTS, MORTIMER RETURNS TO THE HOTEL GRANDE BRÉTAGNE, STILL ESCORTED BY INSPECTOR KAMANTIS.

This officer will keep watch on your floor, Professor. You never know.

Thank you, Inspector, although I think it's an unnecessary precaution.

AND TWO HOURS LATER, AFTER A GOOD MEAL...

Philip, old chap, what strange adventure have you thrown yourself into this time? Blake will be sorry he missed it.

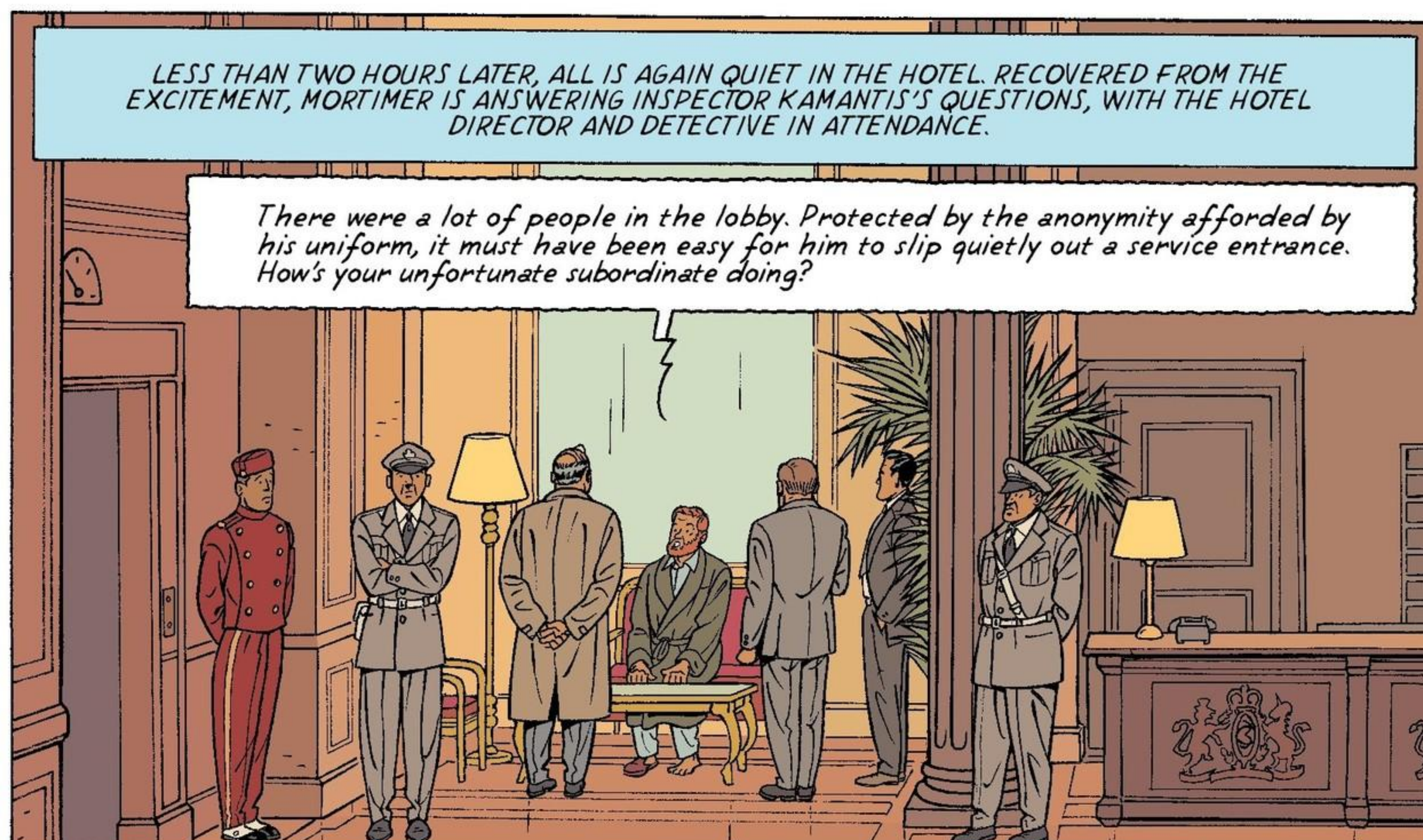








And your attacker vanished?



LESS THAN TWO HOURS LATER, ALL IS AGAIN QUIET IN THE HOTEL. RECOVERED FROM THE EXCITEMENT, MORTIMER IS ANSWERING INSPECTOR KAMANTIS'S QUESTIONS, WITH THE HOTEL DIRECTOR AND DETECTIVE IN ATTENDANCE.

There were a lot of people in the lobby. Protected by the anonymity afforded by his uniform, it must have been easy for him to slip quietly out a service entrance. How's your unfortunate subordinate doing?



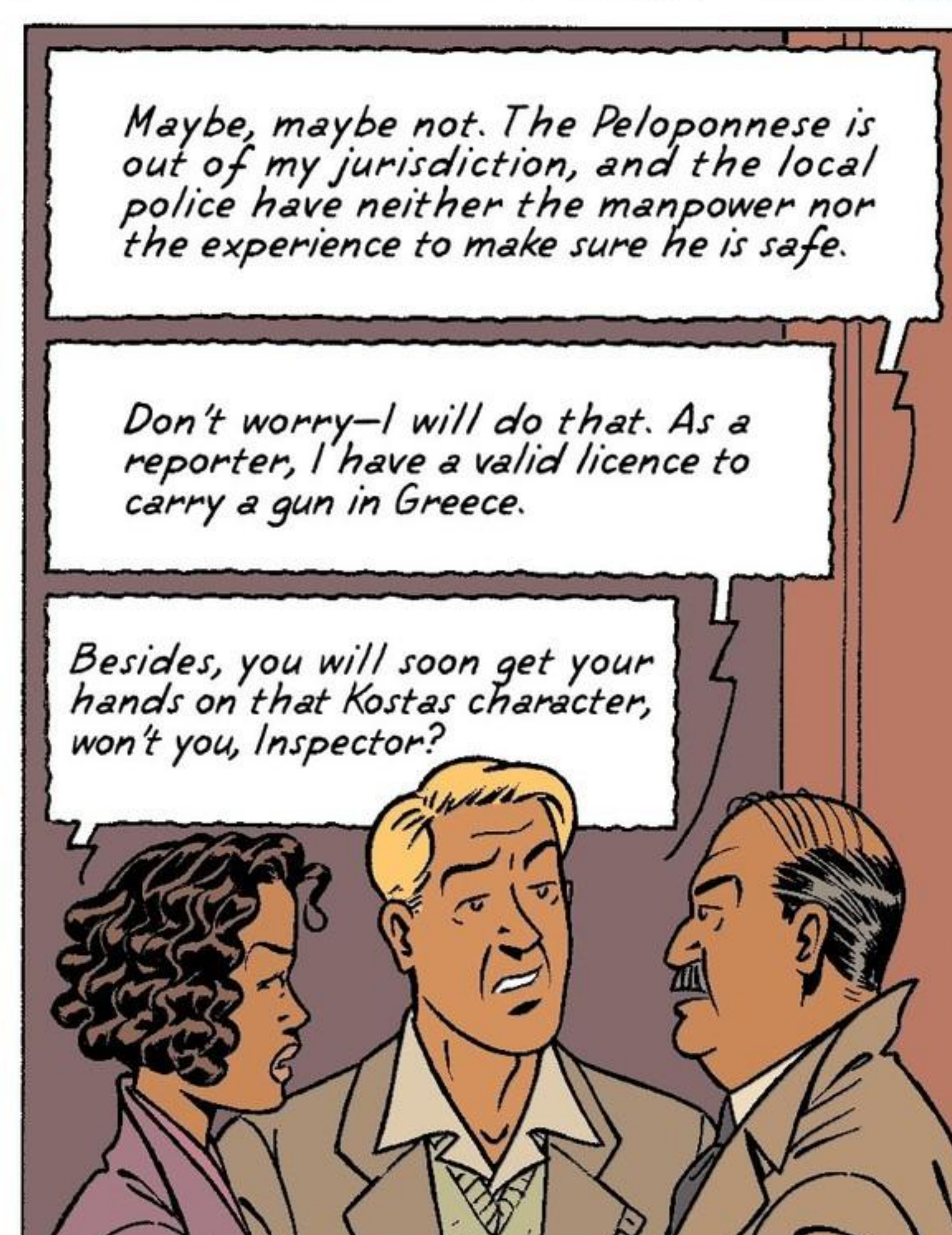
Fortunately, his hat cushioned the blow. He'll have a nasty lump, but he'll be fine. But you, Professor, had a much closer call. You'll be in danger as long as Kostas is at large. It would be more prudent for you to leave Athens today.

That's exactly what he's going to do, Inspector.



We've just heard what happened to you. It's horrible.

Our train for Kalamata leaves in three hours. You'll be safe there.



Maybe, maybe not. The Peloponnese is out of my jurisdiction, and the local police have neither the manpower nor the experience to make sure he is safe.

Don't worry—I will do that. As a reporter, I have a valid licence to carry a gun in Greece.

Besides, you will soon get your hands on that Kostas character, won't you, Inspector?

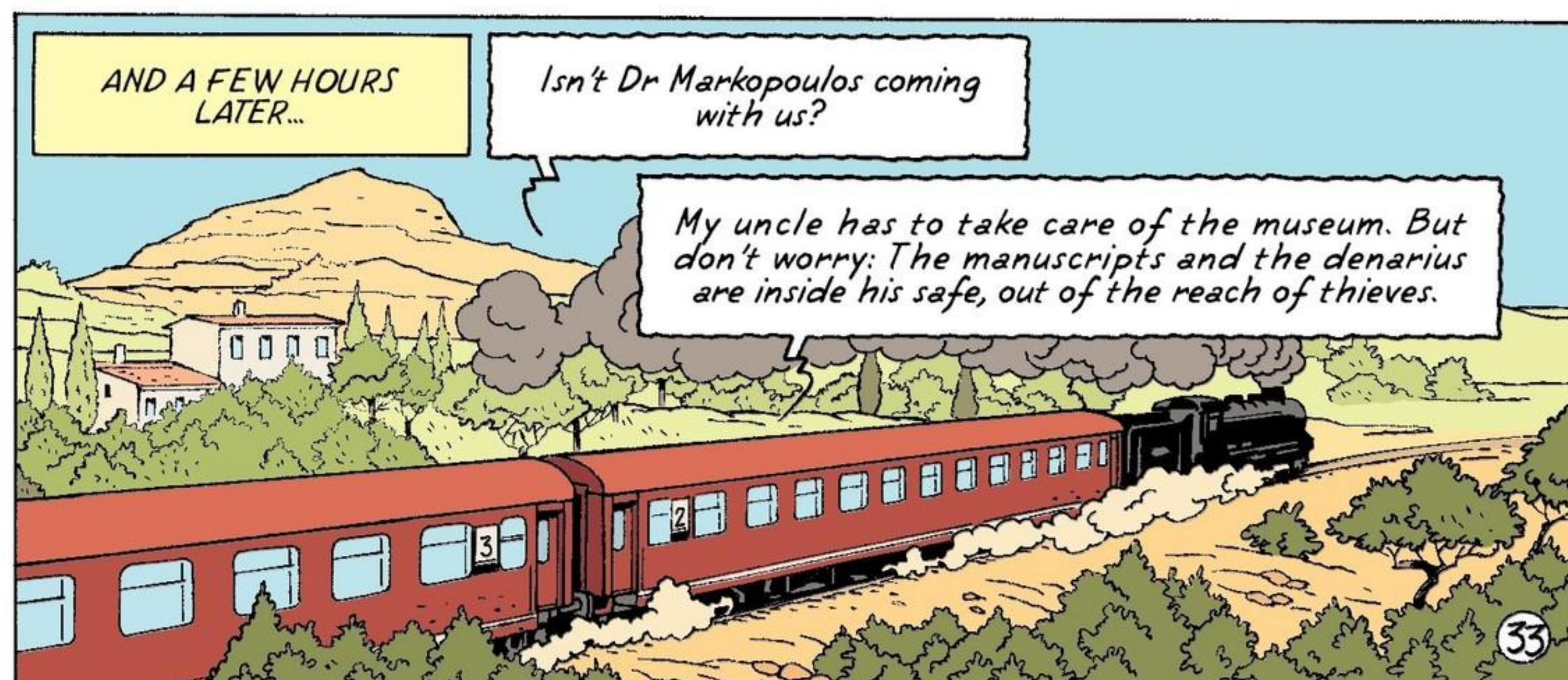


Your slipper, sir. I found it in the service staircase.

Thank you, my good man. I'd never have thought that a slipper would someday save my life.



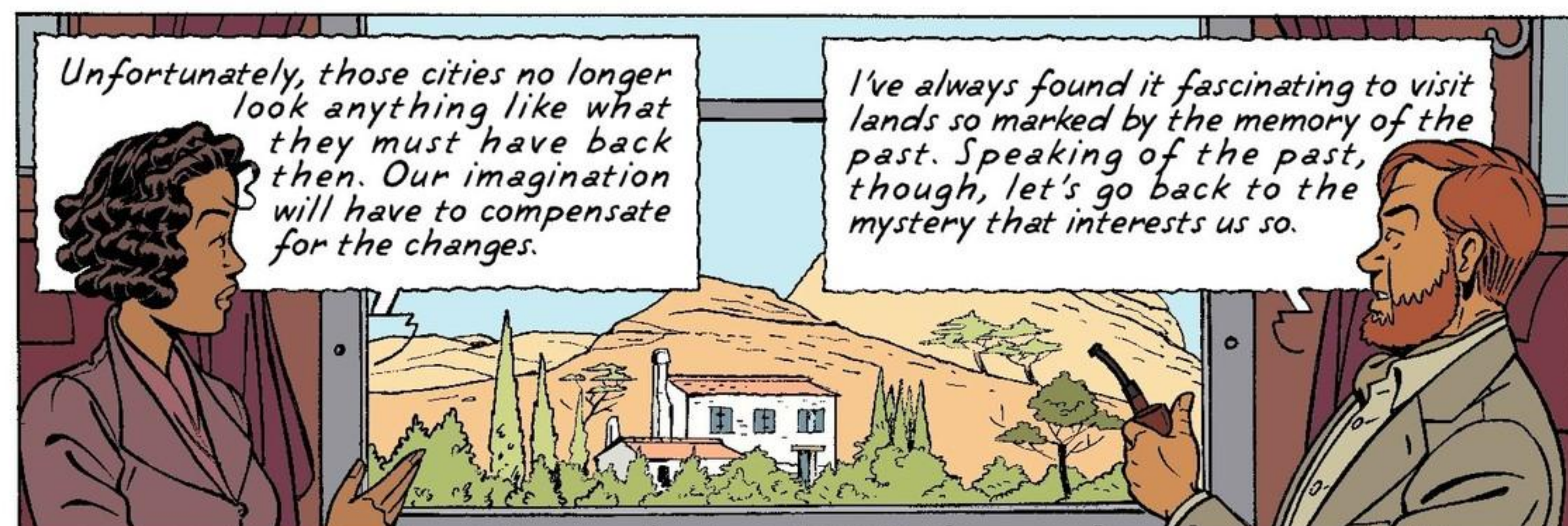
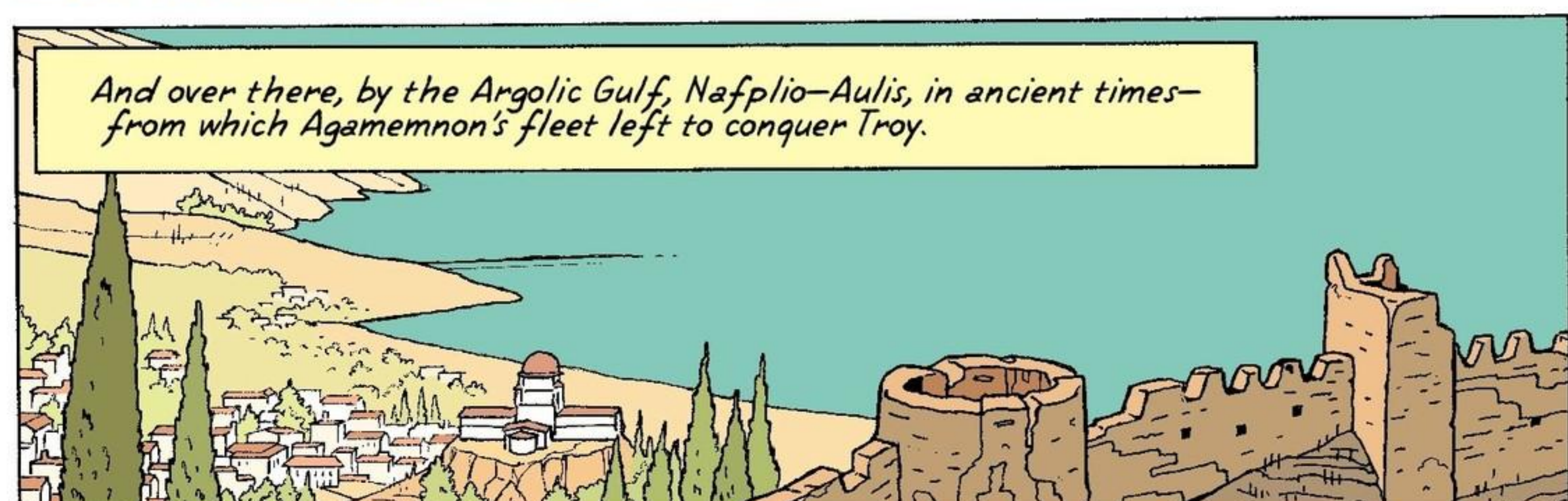
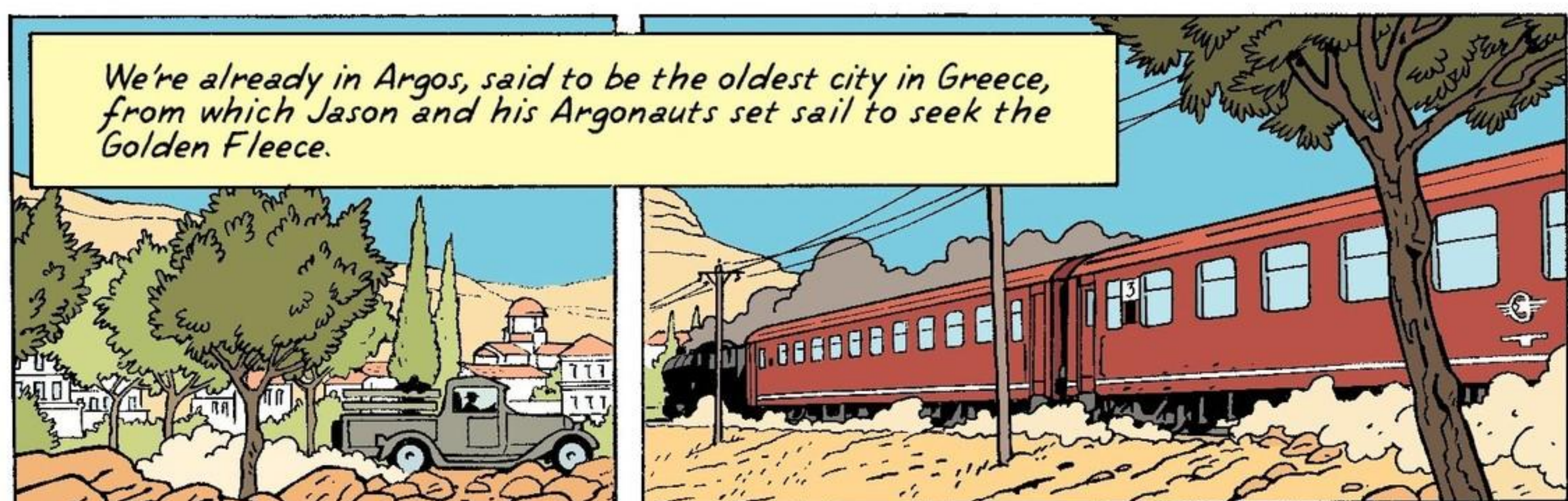
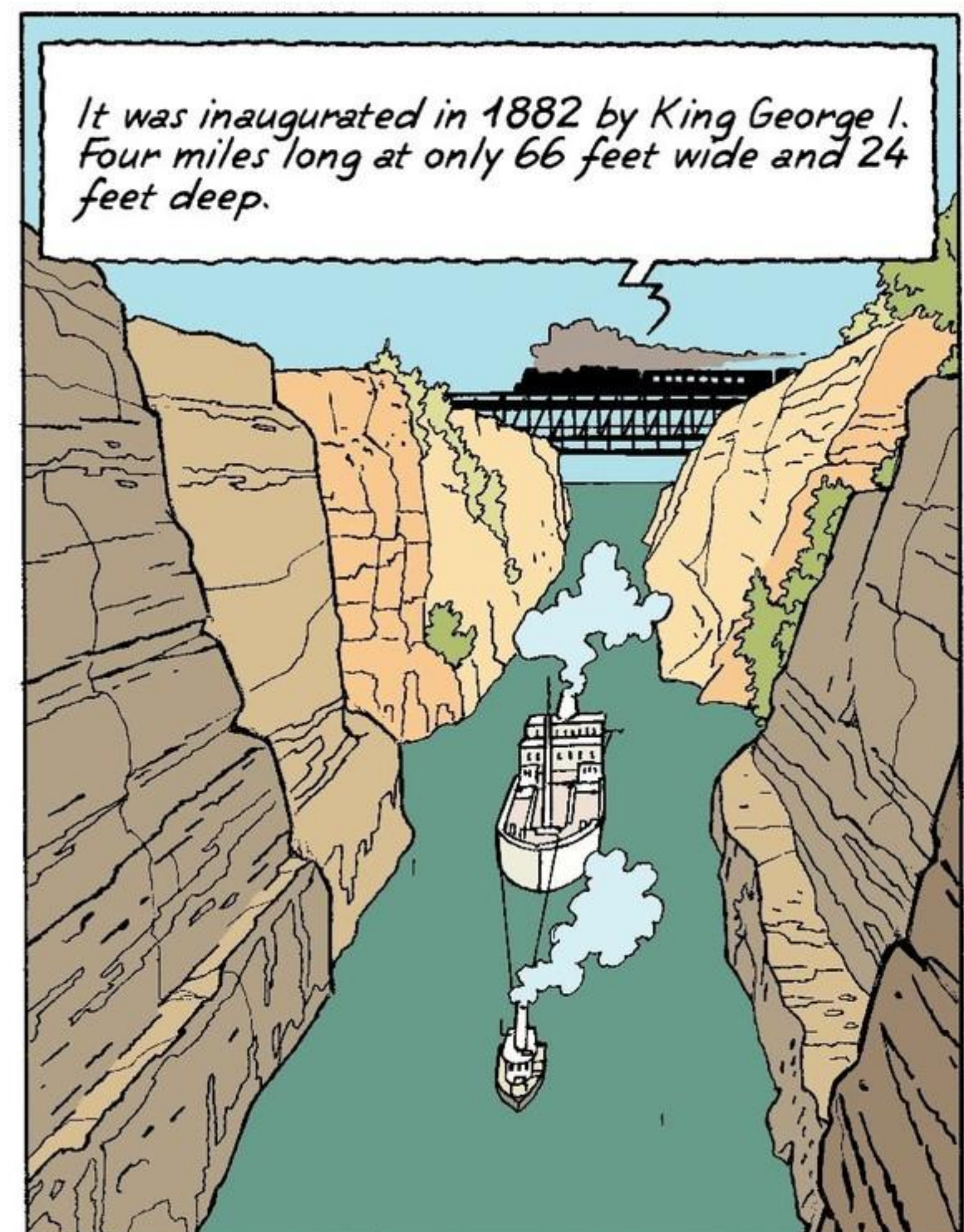
Well, this is sorted, then. I'll just pack my luggage and we can leave for Kalamata.



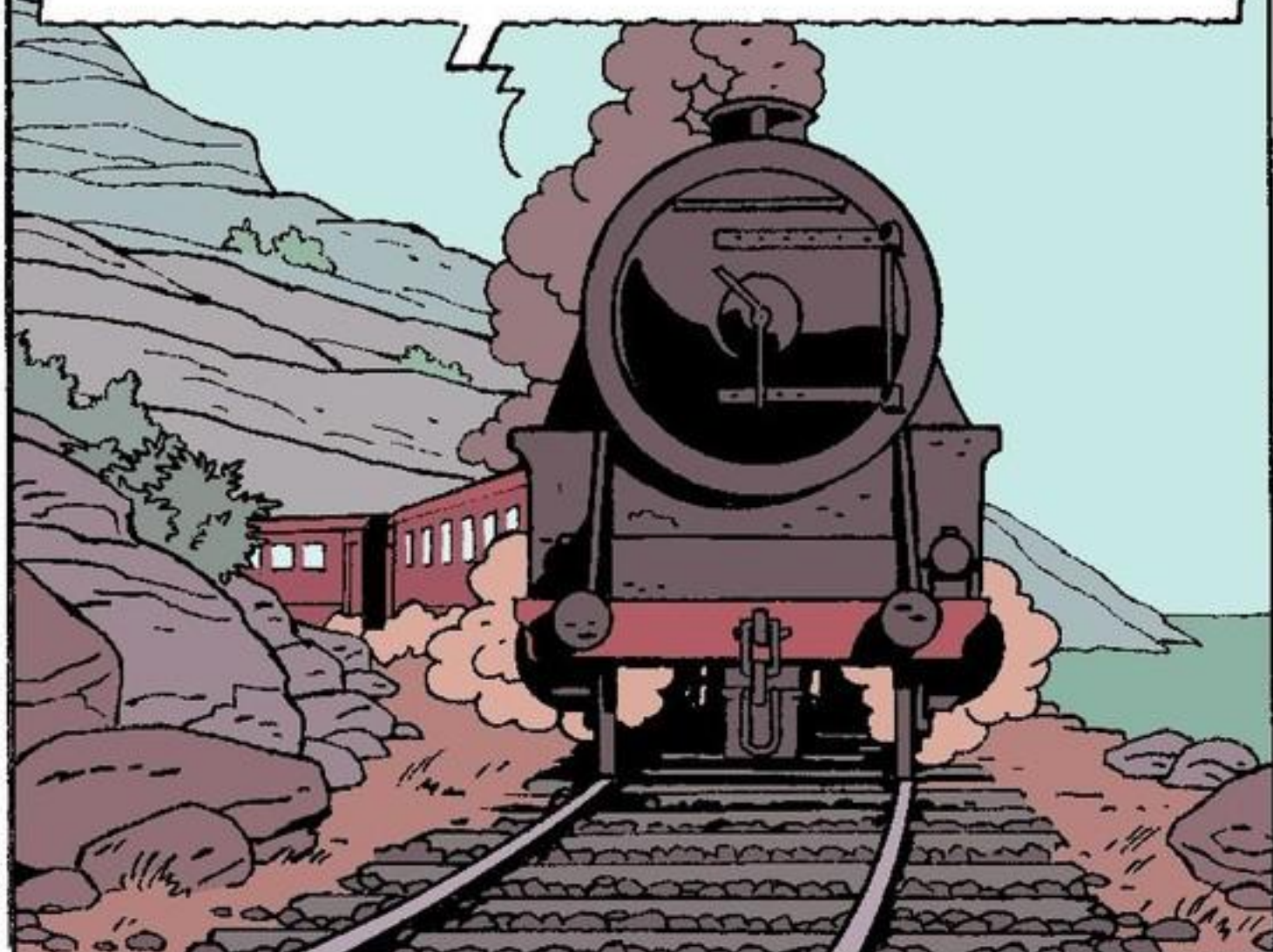
AND A FEW HOURS LATER...

Isn't Dr Markopoulos coming with us?

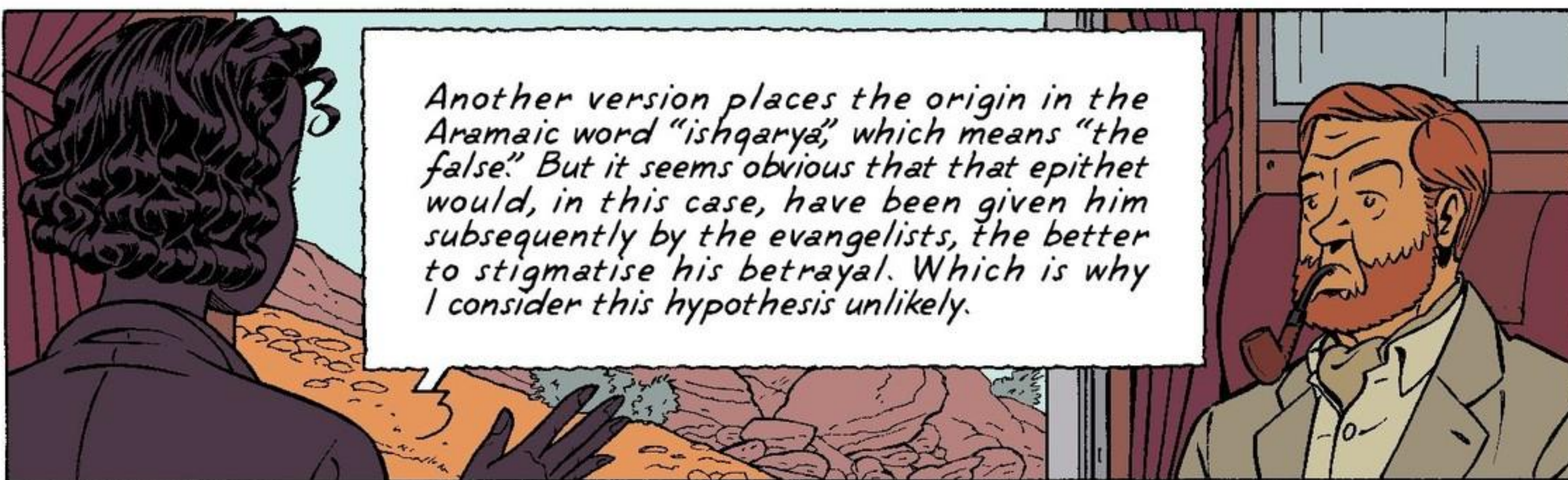
My uncle has to take care of the museum. But don't worry: The manuscripts and the denarius are inside his safe, out of the reach of thieves.



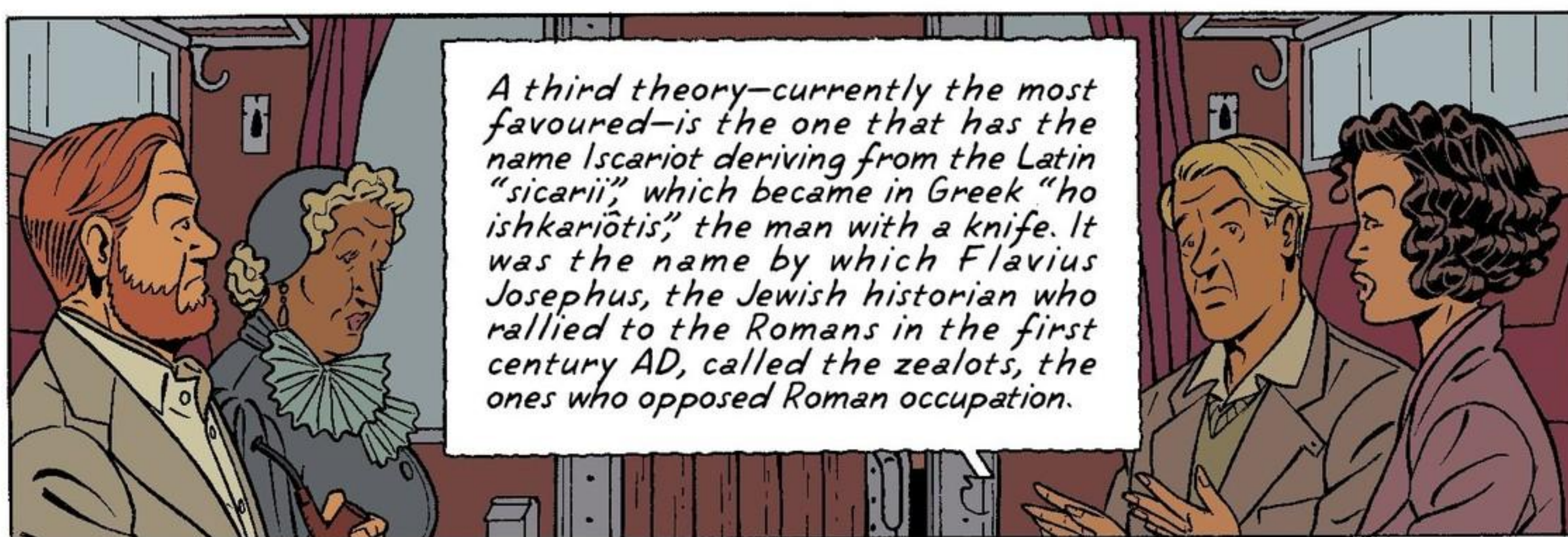
According to some historians, "Iscaariot" could be the modern transposition of "Ish Qeriyot," the man from Kerioth, a village in the south of Judea. So, Judas would have been a Judean, unlike the other 11 apostles and the Christ himself, who were from Galilee. We know that the inhabitants of these two provinces of ancient Palestine despised each other.



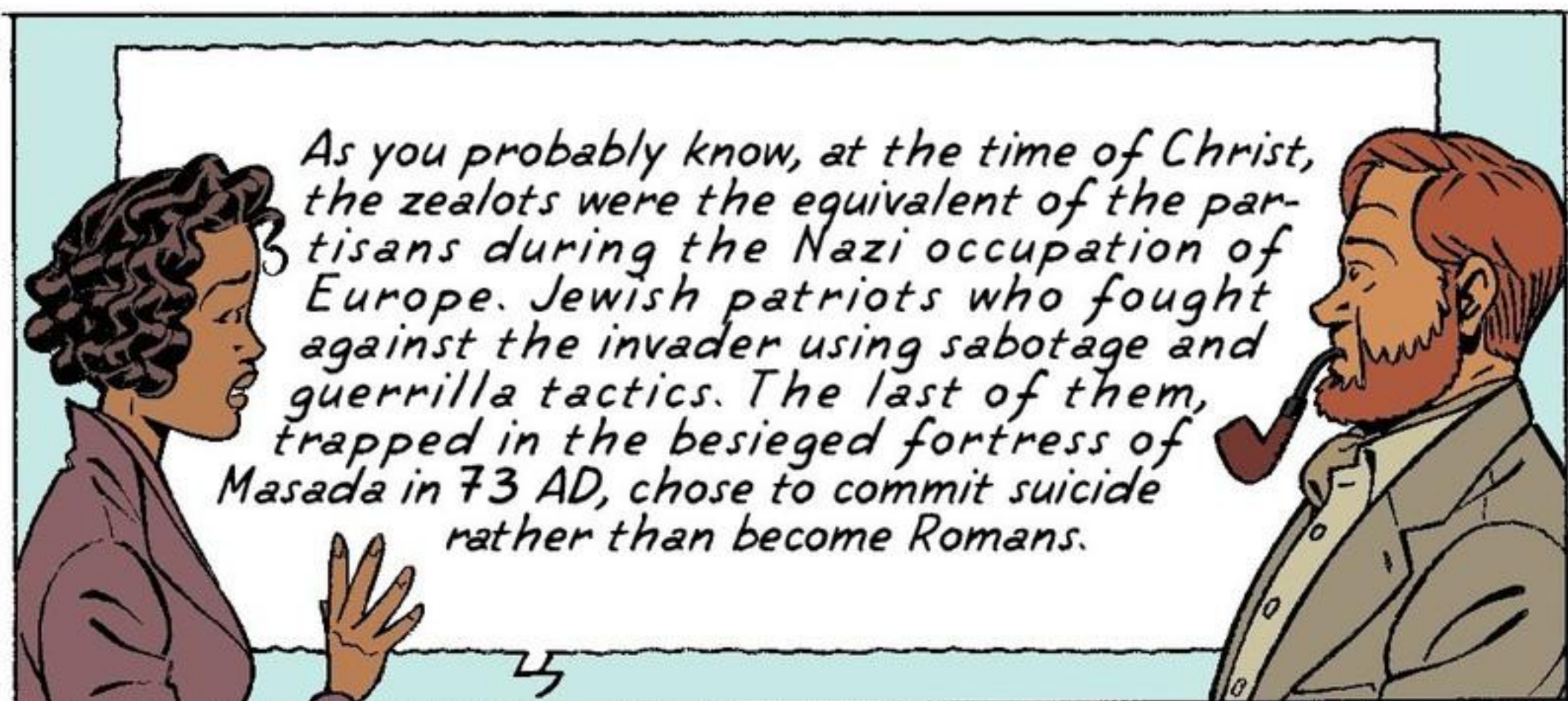
Another version places the origin in the Aramaic word "ishqaryā," which means "the false." But it seems obvious that that epithet would, in this case, have been given him subsequently by the evangelists, the better to stigmatise his betrayal. Which is why I consider this hypothesis unlikely.



A third theory—currently the most favoured—is the one that has the name Iscaariot deriving from the Latin "sicarii," which became in Greek "ho ishkariōtis," the man with a knife. It was the name by which Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian who rallied to the Romans in the first century AD, called the zealots, the ones who opposed Roman occupation.



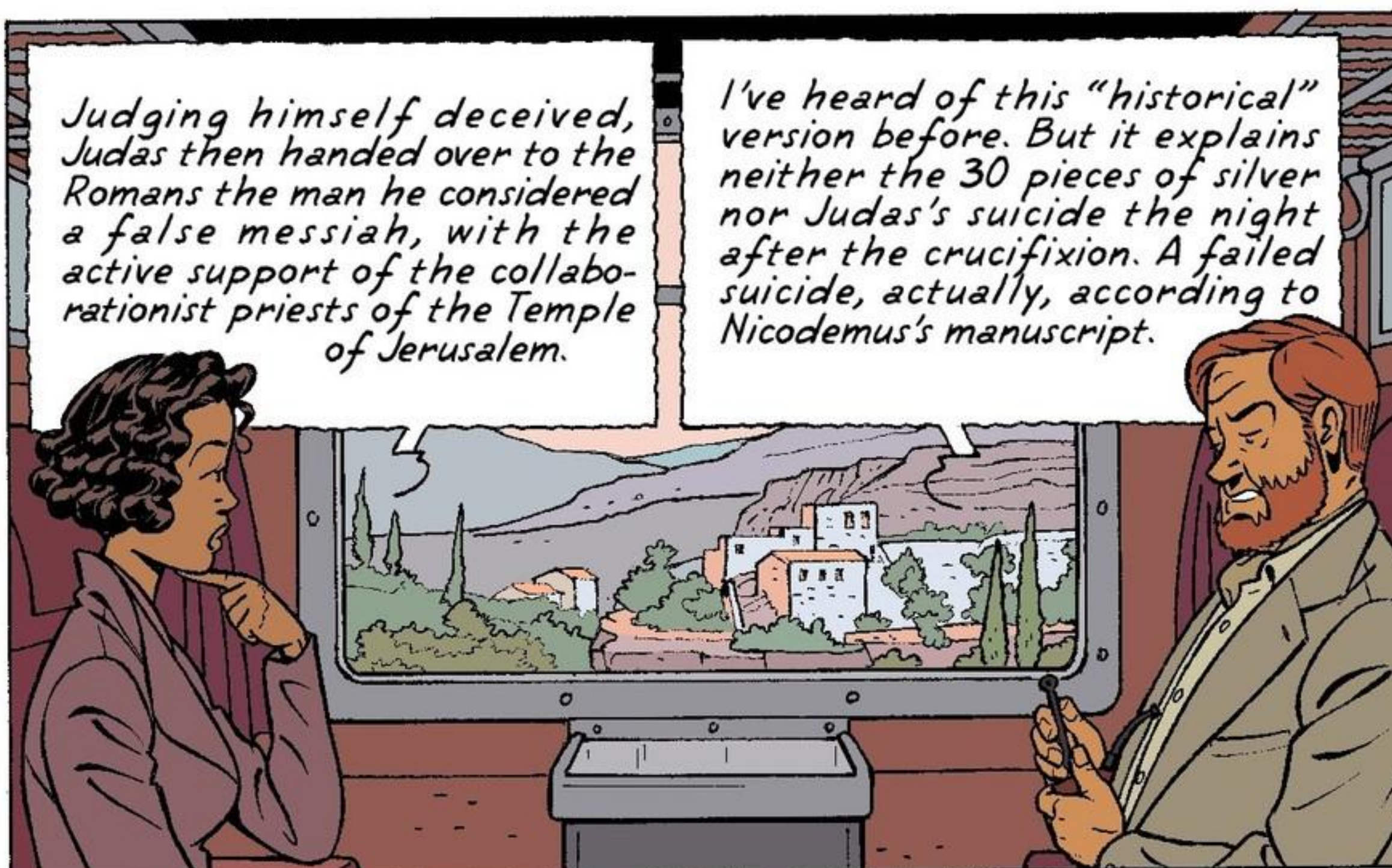
As you probably know, at the time of Christ, the zealots were the equivalent of the partisans during the Nazi occupation of Europe. Jewish patriots who fought against the invader using sabotage and guerrilla tactics. The last of them, trapped in the besieged fortress of Masada in 73 AD, chose to commit suicide rather than become Romans.



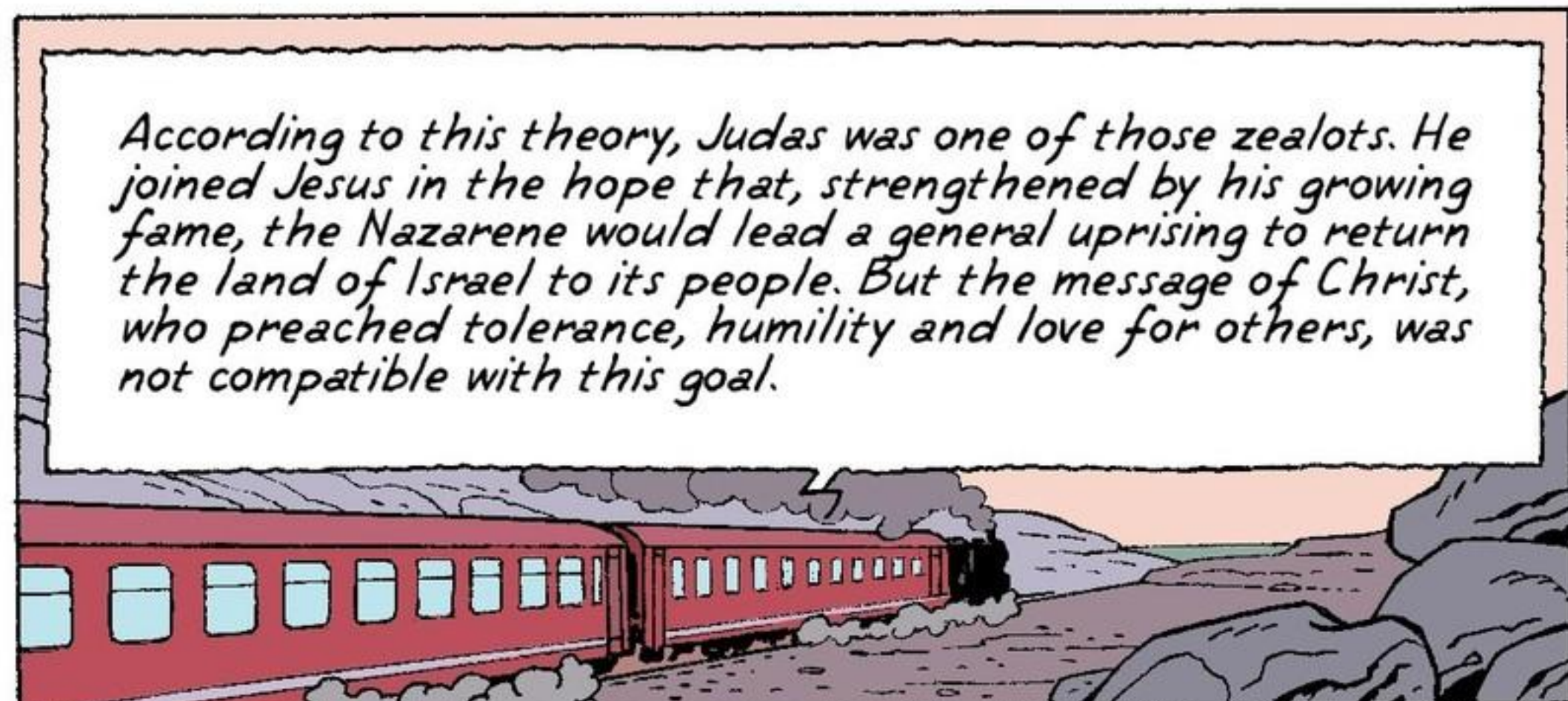
For him who called himself the Son of God, redemption would not be found in our world, but in the next. Moreover, he believed that the Kingdom of Heaven was open to everyone on Earth—a view that the keepers of the faith of the "chosen people" could hardly accept.

Judging himself deceived, Judas then handed over to the Romans the man he considered a false messiah, with the active support of the collaborationist priests of the Temple of Jerusalem.

I've heard of this "historical" version before. But it explains neither the 30 pieces of silver nor Judas's suicide the night after the crucifixion. A failed suicide, actually, according to Nicodemus's manuscript.



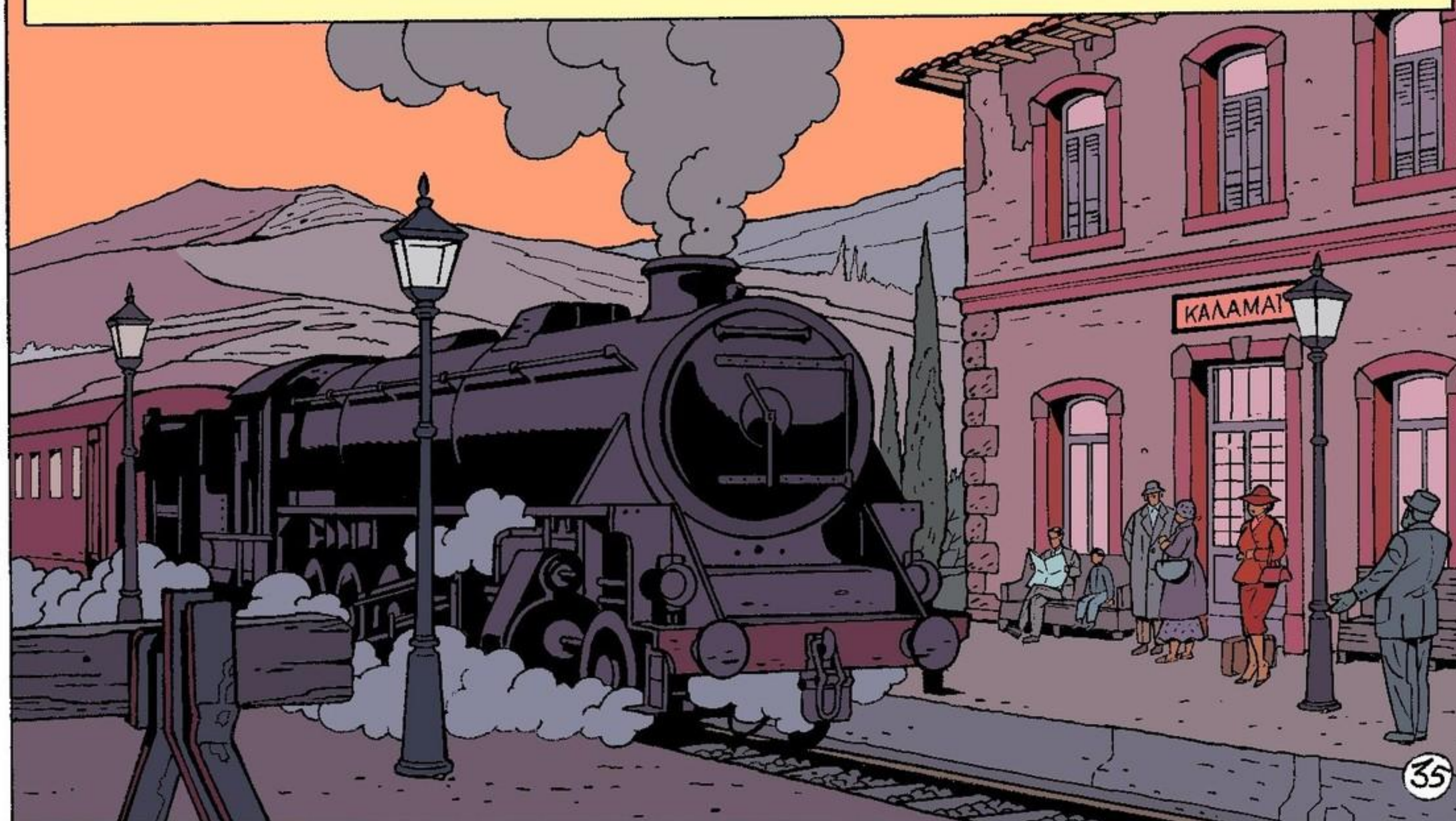
According to this theory, Judas was one of those zealots. He joined Jesus in the hope that, strengthened by his growing fame, the Nazarene would lead a general uprising to return the land of Israel to its people. But the message of Christ, who preached tolerance, humility and love for others, was not compatible with this goal.



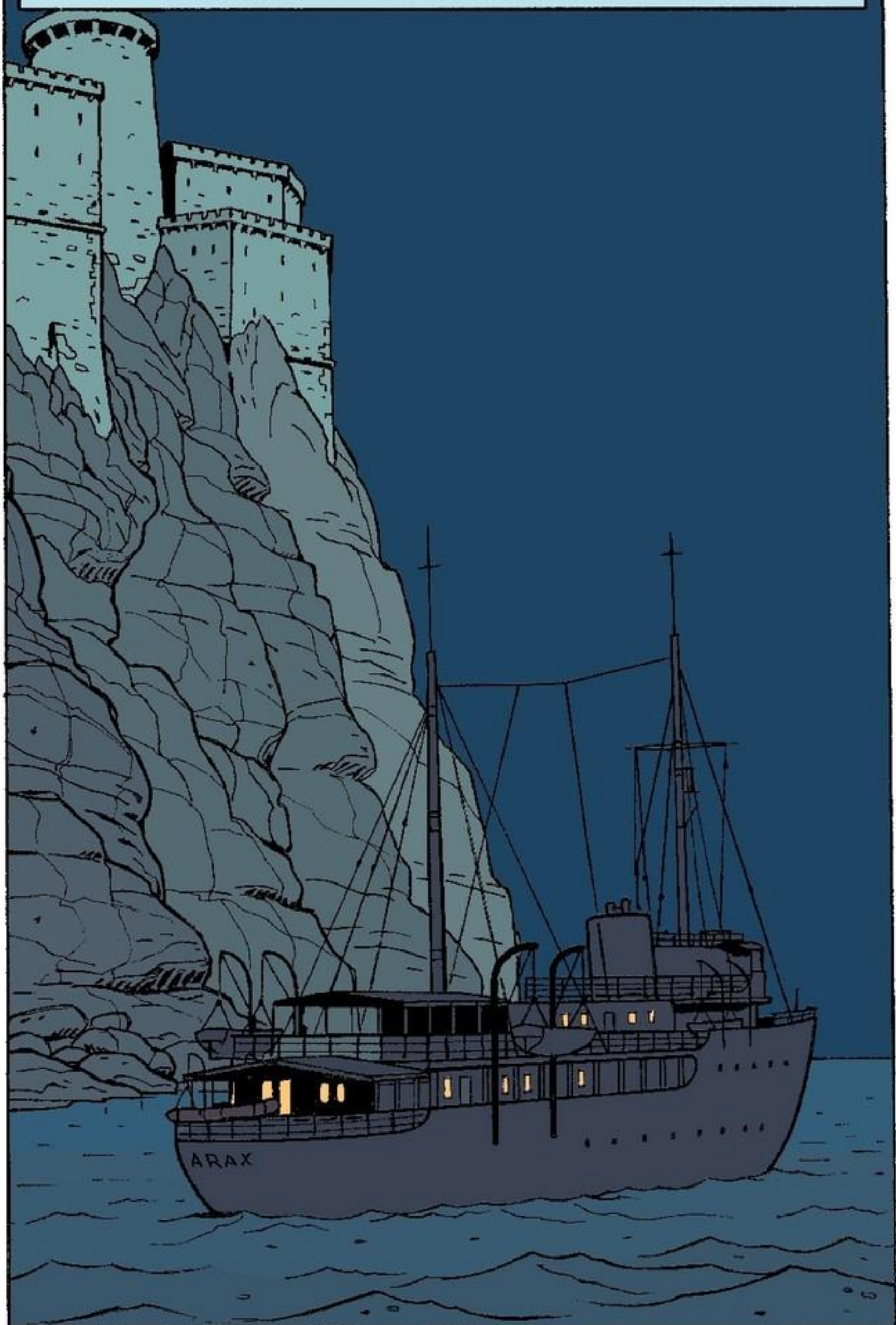
The money could have been given to him to help arrange his escape. As for the suicide, maybe the traitor received a revelation about the true monstrosity of his crime. Beyond our scientific rationalism, we must remain humble before the mysteries of the divine.



CAUGHT IN THEIR FASCINATING DISCUSSION, OUR FRIENDS HAVE NOT NOTICED THE HOURS FLYING BY. THE SUN IS SETTING WHEN THEIR TRAIN ARRIVES AT THE STATION OF KALAMATA, THE GREAT SOUTHERN PORT OF THE PELOPONNESE AT THE EDGE OF THE MANI PENINSULA.



MEANWHILE, LESS THAN 130 MILES AWAY, THE ARAX IS ANCHORED SOME DISTANCE FROM A SMALL, ROCKY ISLAND DOMINATED BY THE IMPOSING SILHOUETTE OF A MEDIEVAL CASTLE. ON THE DECK...



... OLRİK IS GETTING IMPATIENT. BELOS BELUKIAN HAS BEEN ASHORE FOR OVER TWO HOURS AND HAS ASKED HIM TO WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE COMES TO GET HIM...



... WHICH DOESN'T AGREE WITH THE RENEGADE, FOR WHOM PATIENCE HAS NEVER BEEN A VIRTUE.

By the devil, what game is this they want me to play?!



Finally! It's about time!



WITHOUT A WORD, THE TWO CREWMEN HAVE TAKEN THE "COLONEL" ABOARD AND HEADED BACK TO THE SHORE.



THEN, AFTER HAVING GONE UP A STEEPLY SLOPED TRAIL...



... THEY WALK THROUGH THE IMPOSING FRONT GATE OF THE FORTRESS.

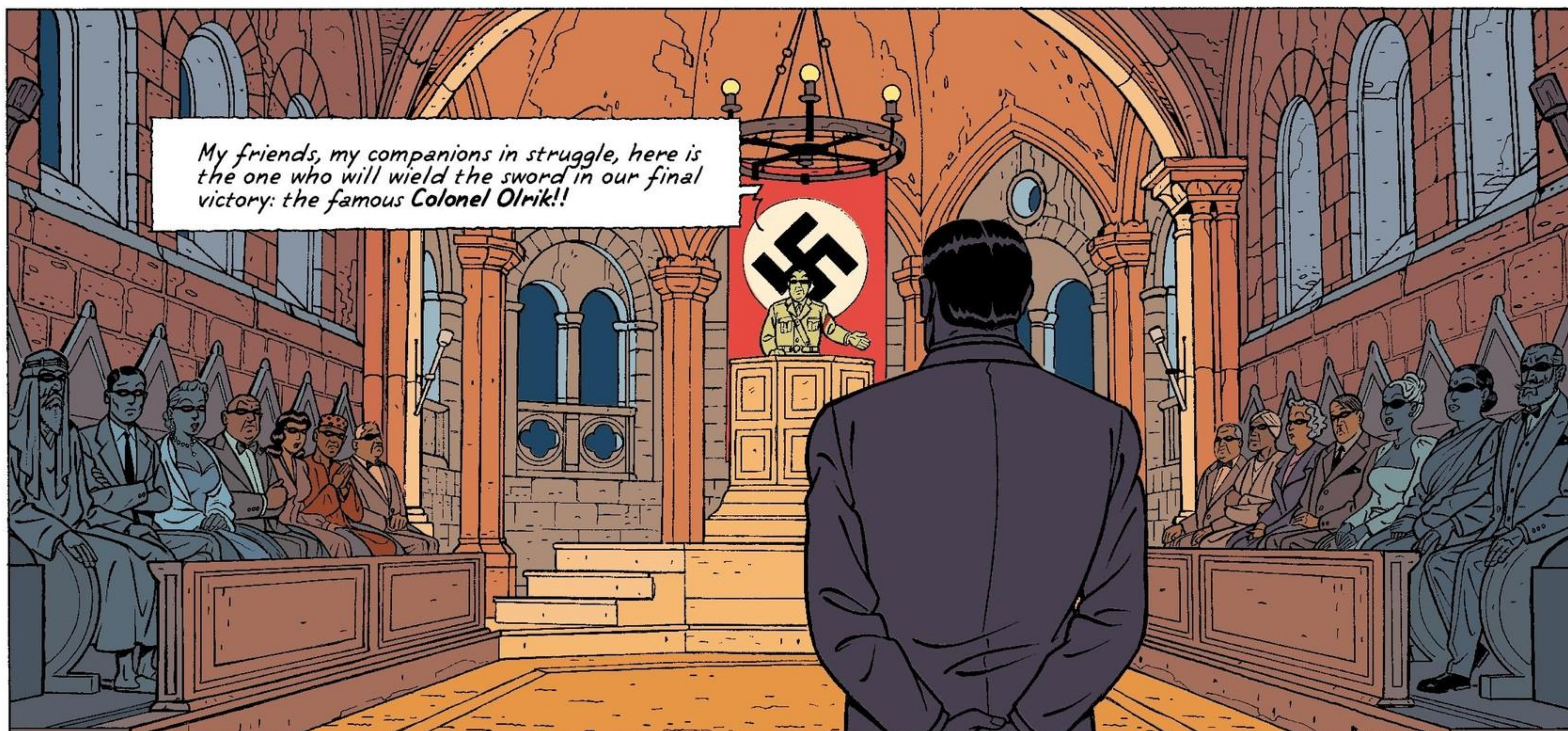


STILL ACCOMPANIED BY THE TWO HENCHMEN, OLRİK ADVANCES THROUGH A CORRIDOR LEADING TO A LARGE DOOR...



... WHICH OPENS BEFORE HIM AS IF BY MAGIC.





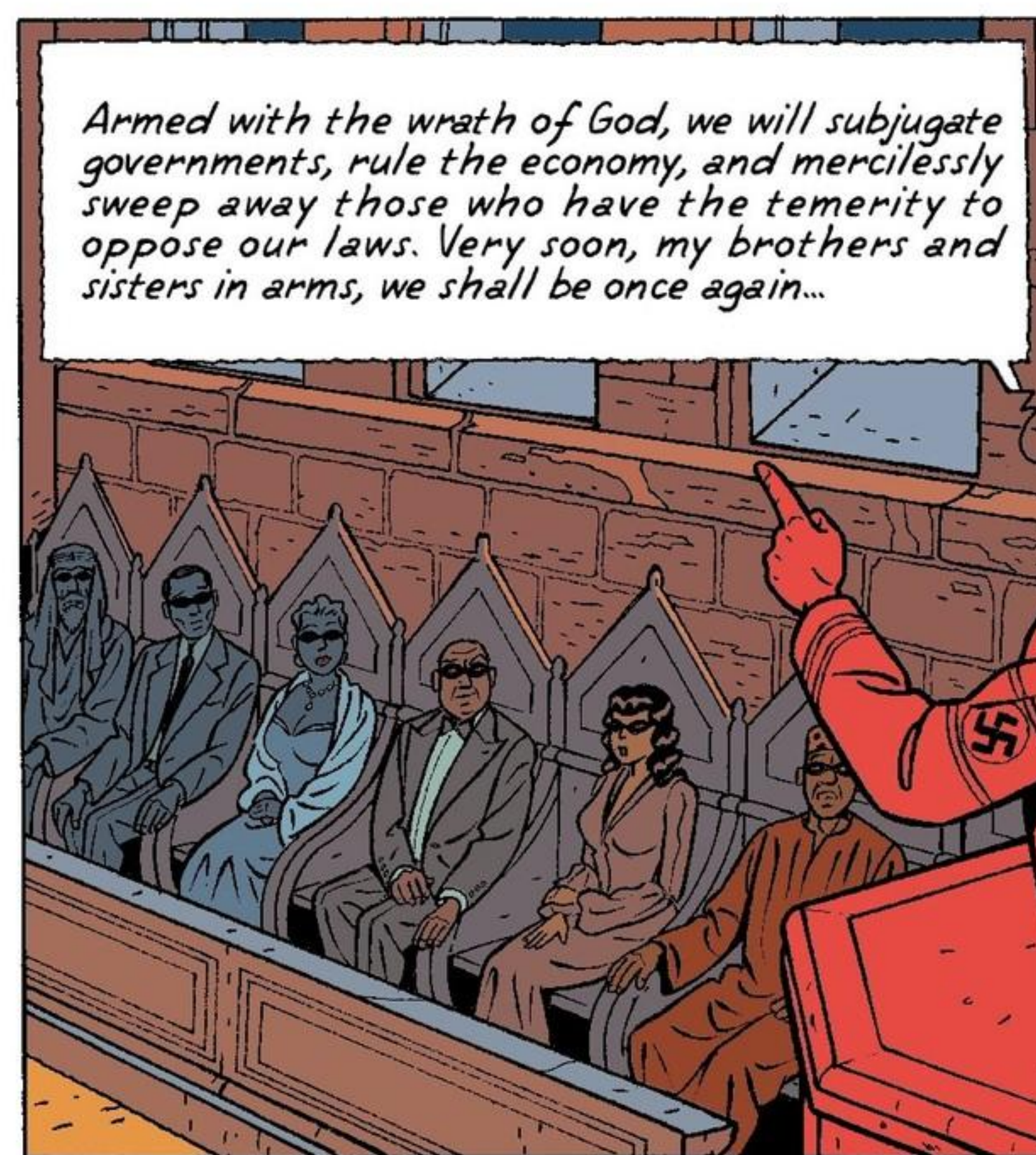
My friends, my companions in struggle, here is the one who will wield the sword in our final victory: the famous Colonel Olrik!!



Thanks to your unfailing support as key decision-makers in the world's affairs, thanks to the enormous means at our disposal, the hour of our triumph will soon be upon us. For we are about to obtain the supreme weapon of vengeance.



And the scourge of God will strike, like lightning, the bleating flock of impious masses. By fire and steel, like modern Teutonic Knights, we will bring the worshippers of false values to their knees.



Armed with the wrath of God, we will subjugate governments, rule the economy, and mercilessly sweep away those who have the temerity to oppose our laws. Very soon, my brothers and sisters in arms, we shall be once again...



... MASTERS OF THE WORLD!!!

WITH THE STRANGE SECRET MEETING OVER, BELUKIAN LEADS OLRİK OUTSIDE THE FORTRESS.

Now you know who we are and what we stand for. What did you think of my little speech, Colonel?

I found it impressive. My former employer, Emperor Basam Damdu*, was a great admirer of your ideology.

You were his military advisor and chief of intelligence, weren't you?

I was. And if it hadn't been for the Swordfishes of those damned Brits, we'd rule the entire world by now.

As you know, power begets wealth, and you will be well paid. But, in the meantime, we must do what's needed to stop Mortimer and his cronies from reaching the goal of our quest before us.

It'll be with great pleasure, Belukian. I have an old, personal score to settle with the good professor.

I know. Before our own defeat, our beloved Führer signed a secret agreement with your emperor. But our revenge will be glorious. After I have achieved my objectives, I would like you to be the head of my intelligence and security department.

I know. By the way, I'd prefer that you call me by my real name from now on: von Stahl. Colonel Count Rainer von Stahl. As soon as we have triumphed, I shall finally be able to live openly as myself again.

You and I are of the same race, Olrık: the warrior race, the race of the strong. We must show no mercy for cowards, weaklings and incompetents.

SEE THIS MAN? HIS NAME IS KOSTAS. AS I TOLD YOU BEFORE, I'D GIVEN HIM AN EASY MISSION IN ATHENS. NOT ONLY DID HE FAIL, BUT HE LET THE POLICE IDENTIFY HIM.

What punishment does he deserve, do you think?

He must be done away with, obviously.

WE'RE AGREED. WOULD YOU CARE TO DO THE HONOURS?

What is it, Colonel? Why do you hesitate?

*SEE THE SECRET OF THE SWORDFISH.



I usually leave this sort of dirty work to my underlings, Count von Stahl.

No doubt, my dear fellow. But you're one of us now. Surely, you understand that I need a token of your resolve in serving our cause.



Very well...

No... No... Mercy...



A SHORT BURST SHATTERS THE NIGHT'S QUIET...



... FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY THE MUFFLED SOUND OF A BODY BEING THROWN INTO THE DARK WATERS BATTERING THE CLIFF'S BASE.



THE NEXT DAY, UNAWARE OF THE TRAGEDY THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE NOT FAR FROM THEM, WHILE JIM RADCLIFF HAS GONE TO SEND HIS DAILY STORY BY TELEGRAPH, MORTIMER AND ELENI FIND THEMSELVES ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG OF THE CHAPEL BURIED BY THE 451 AD EARTHQUAKE.

How marvellous!



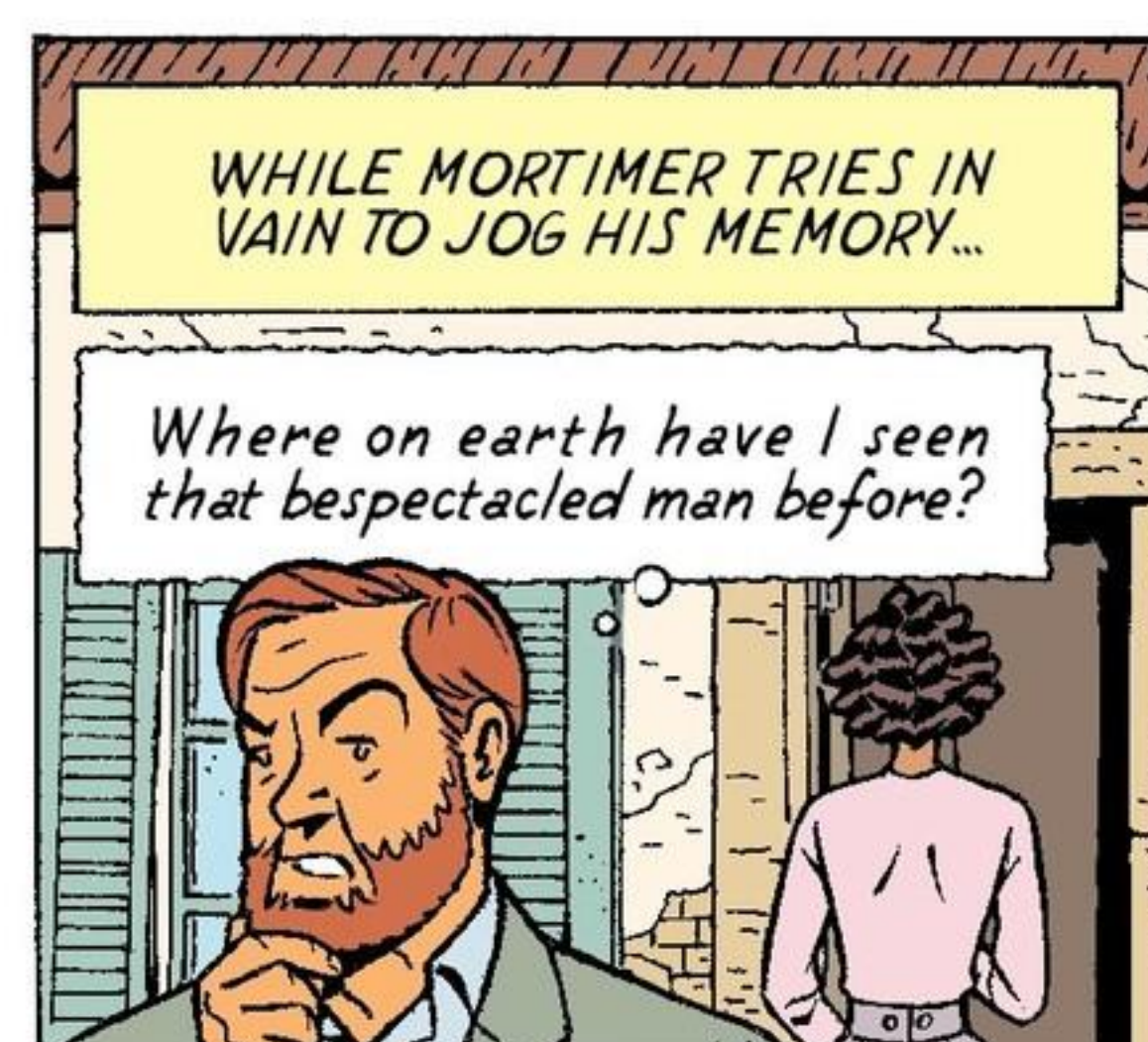
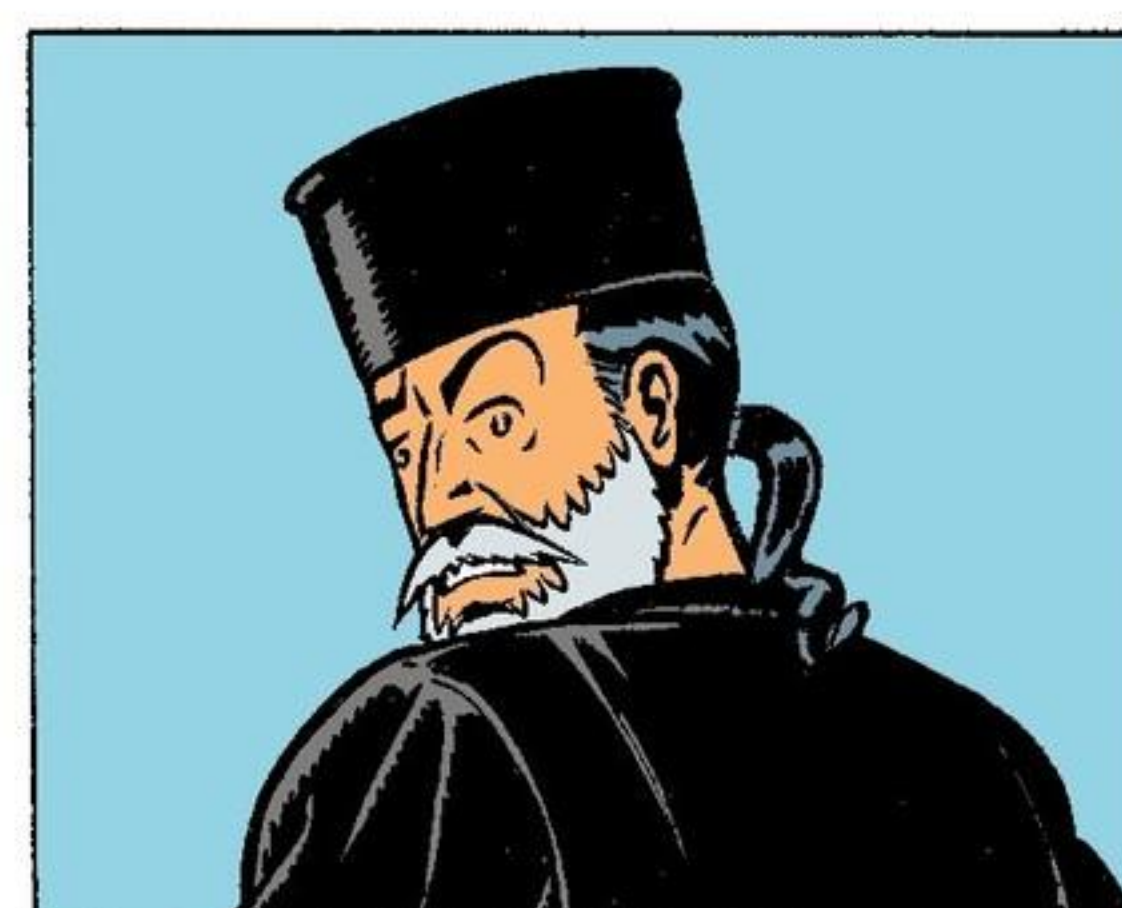
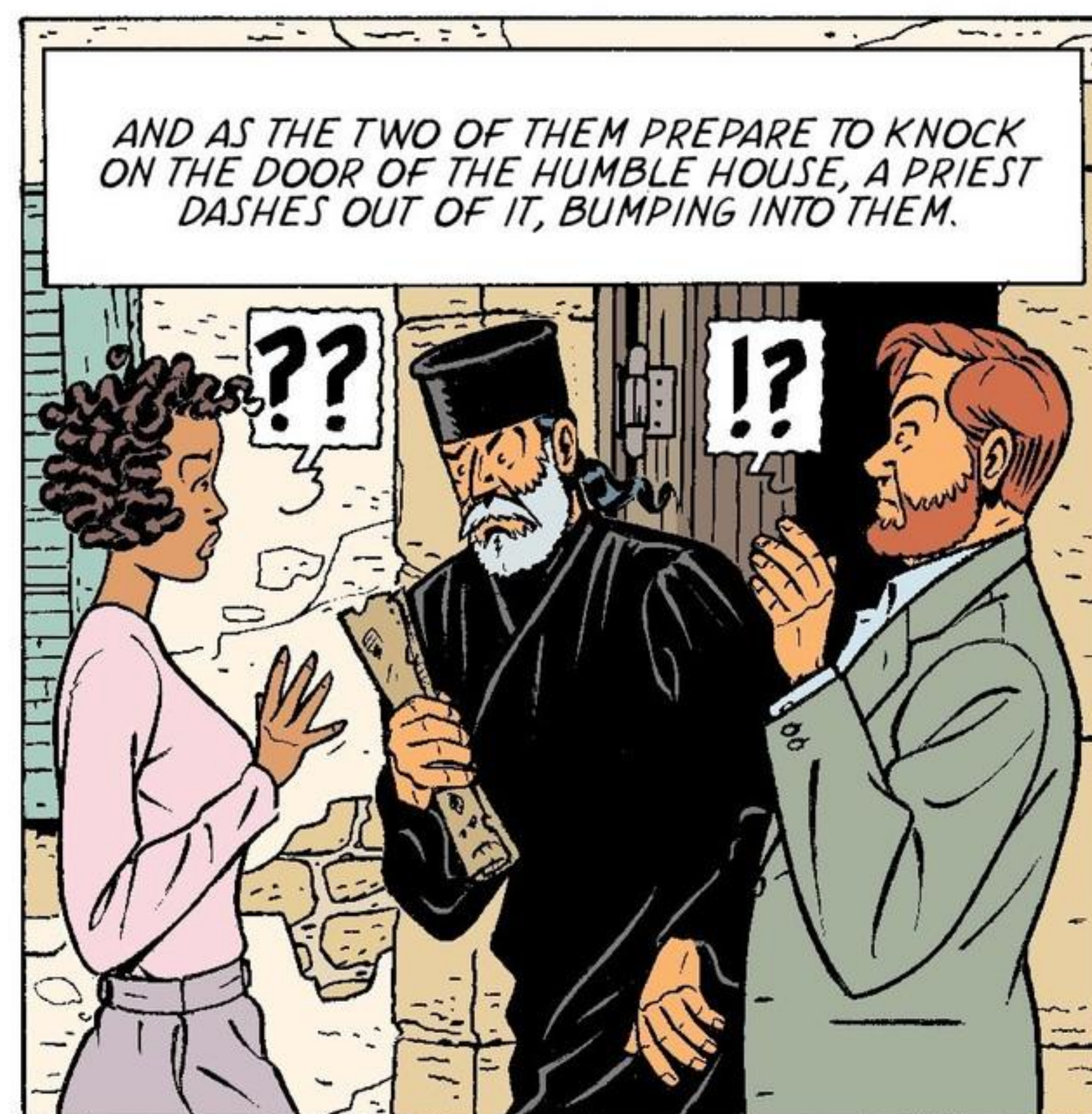
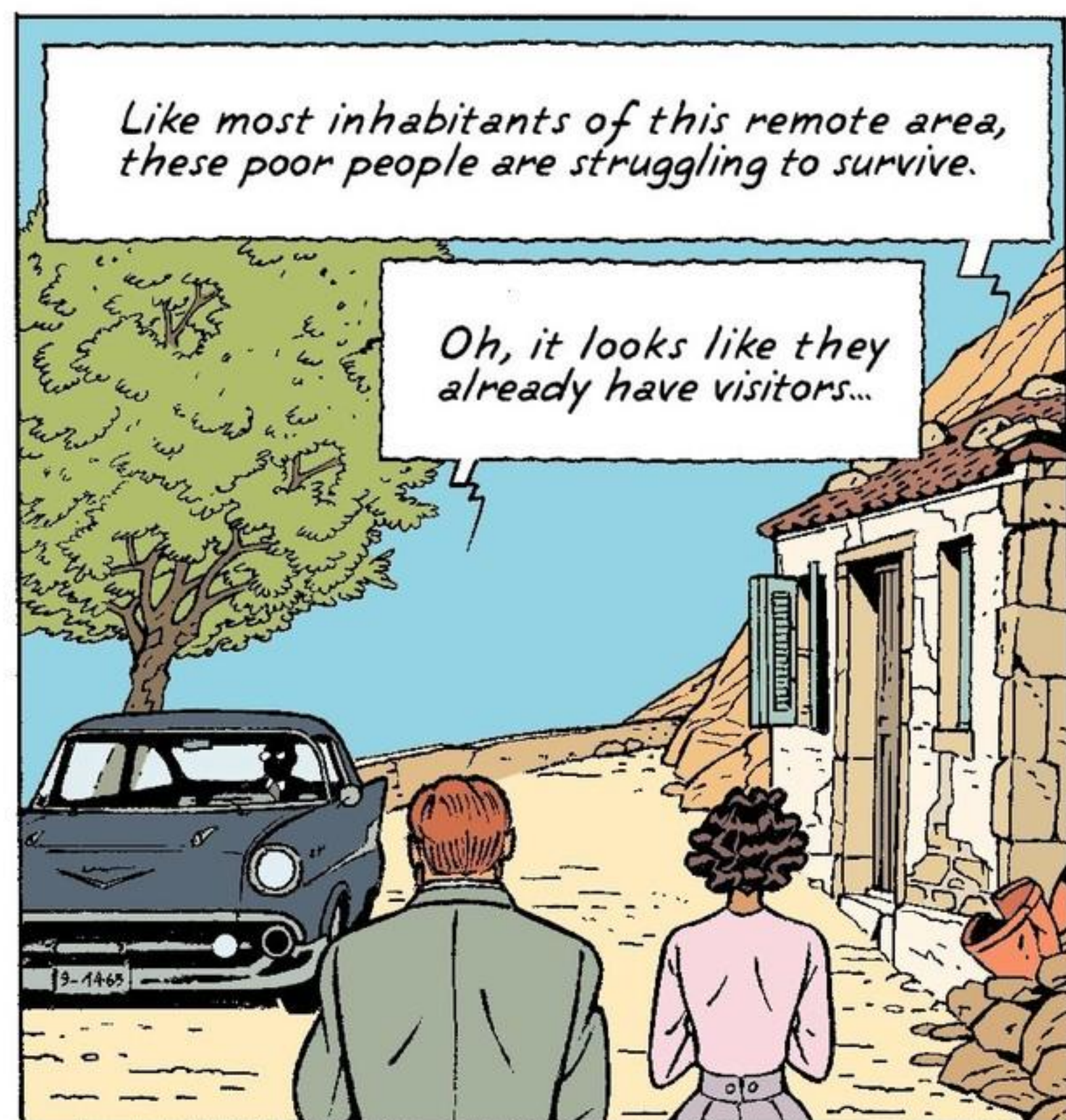
These frescoes are wonderful. Probably the most beautiful and best preserved I've ever had the chance to see.

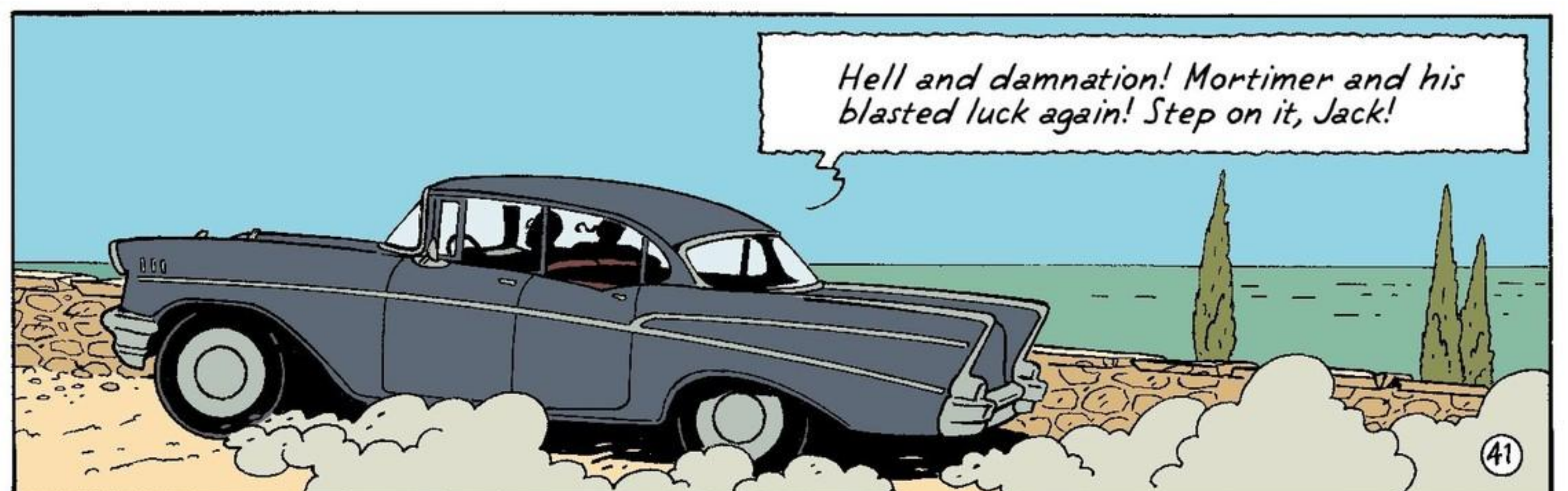
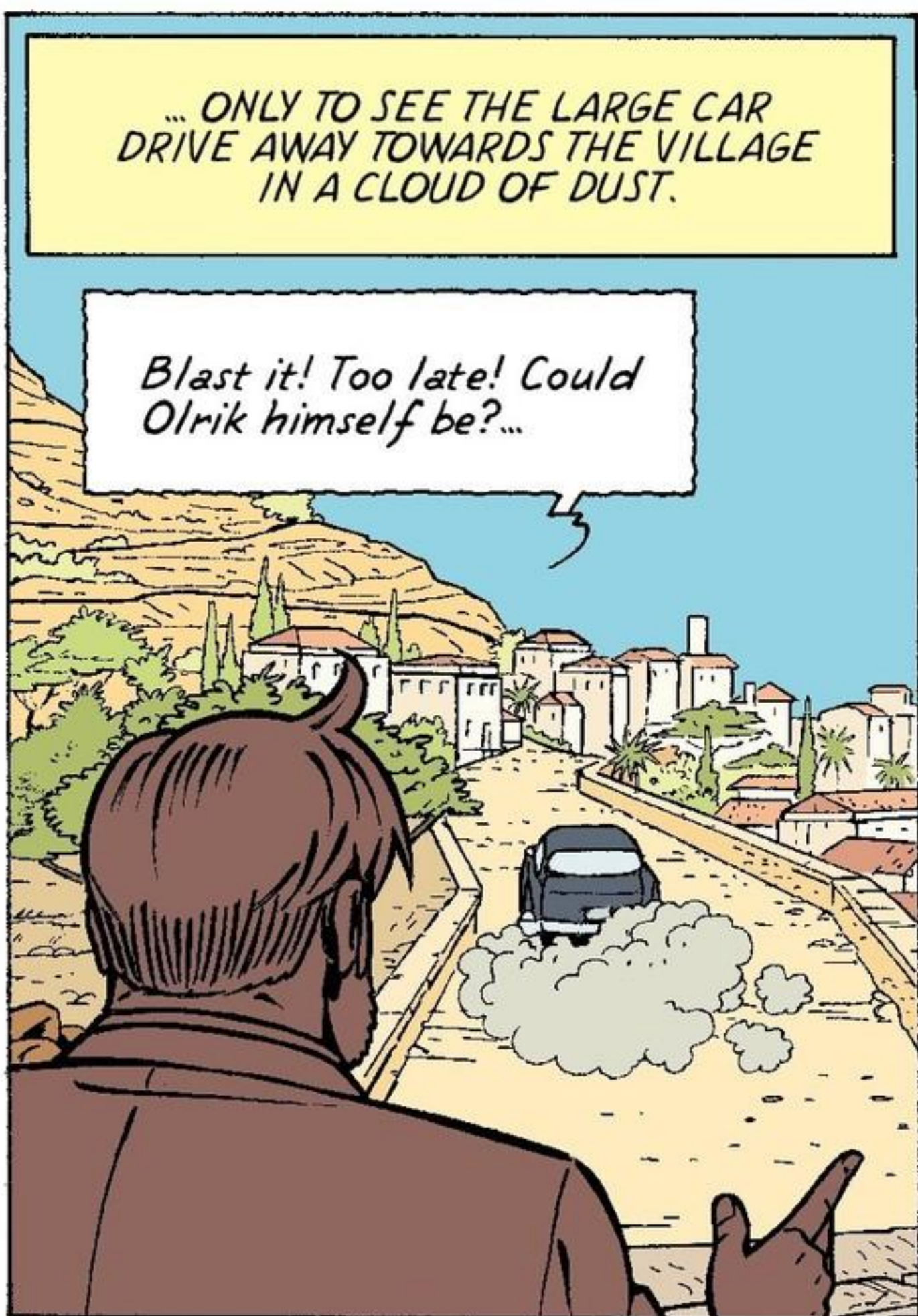
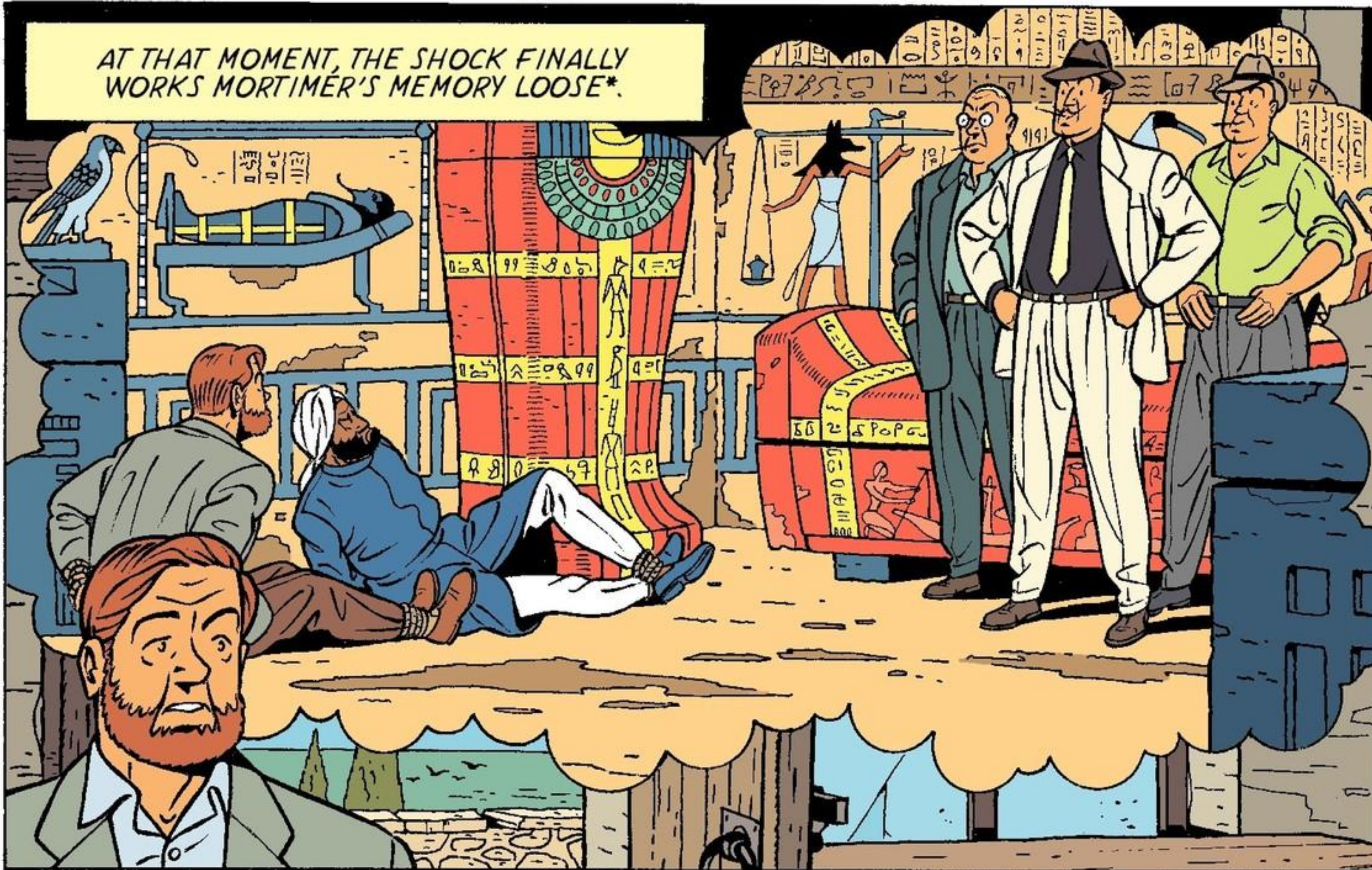
I was certain you'd think so, Professor.



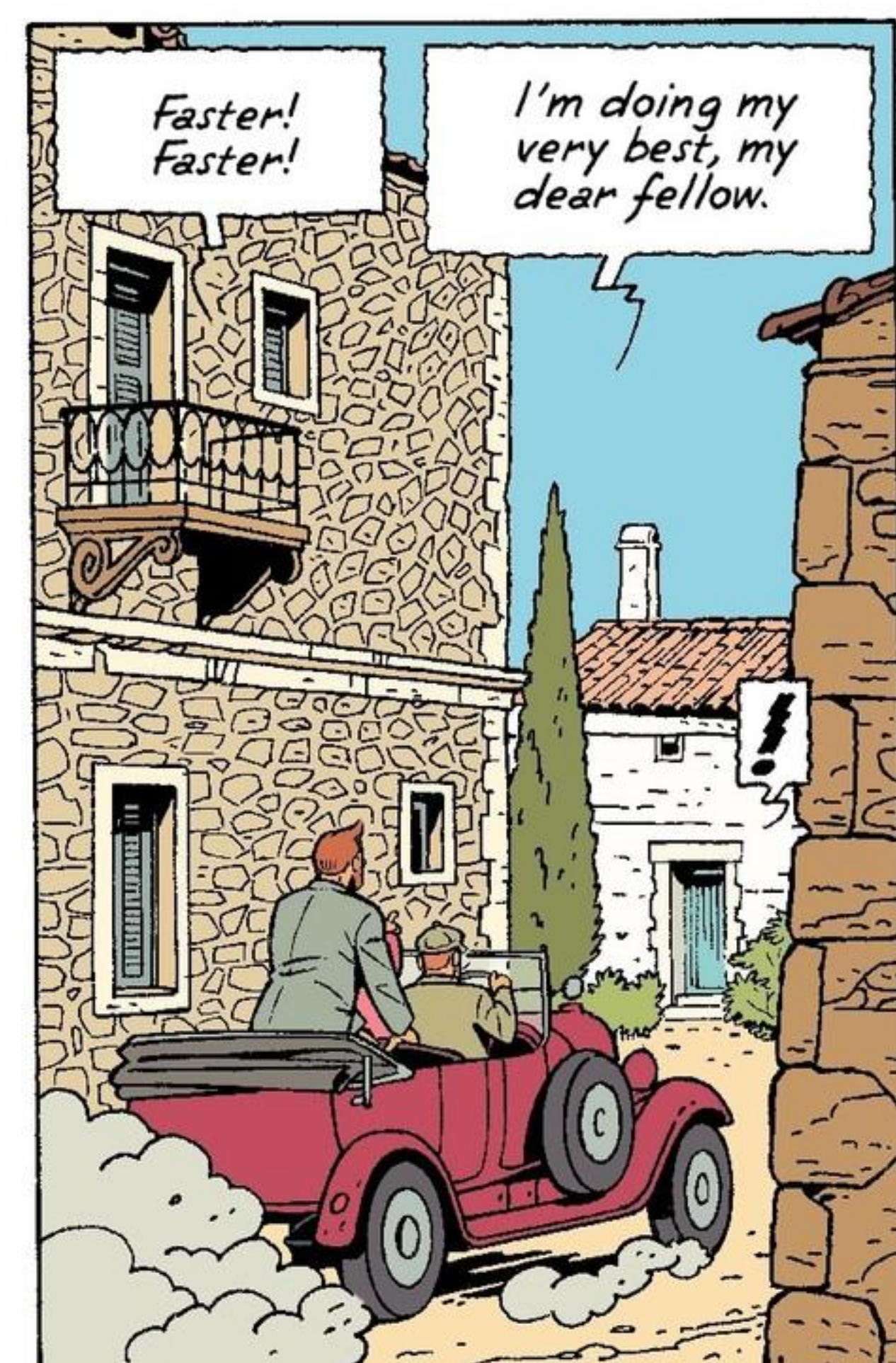
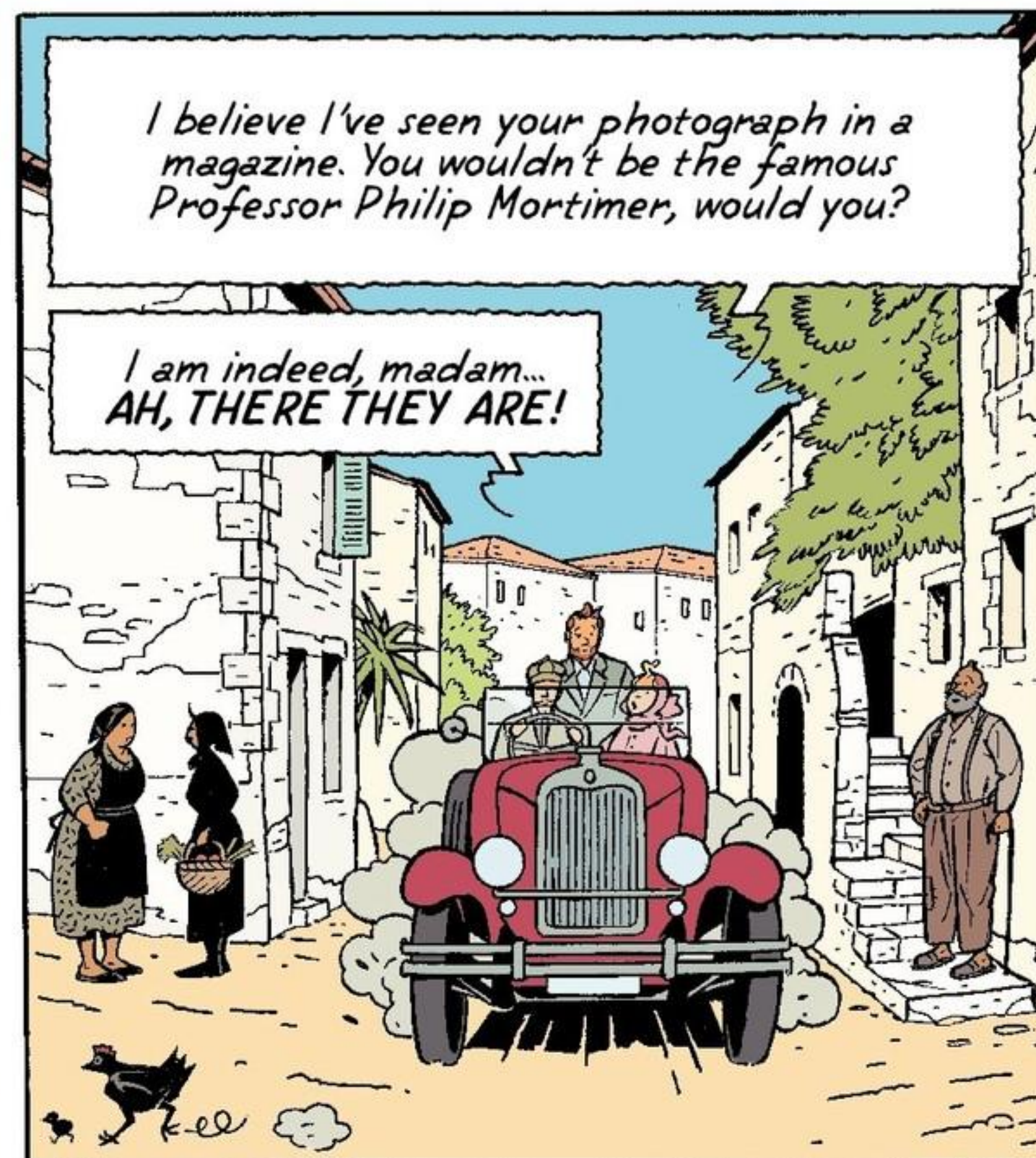
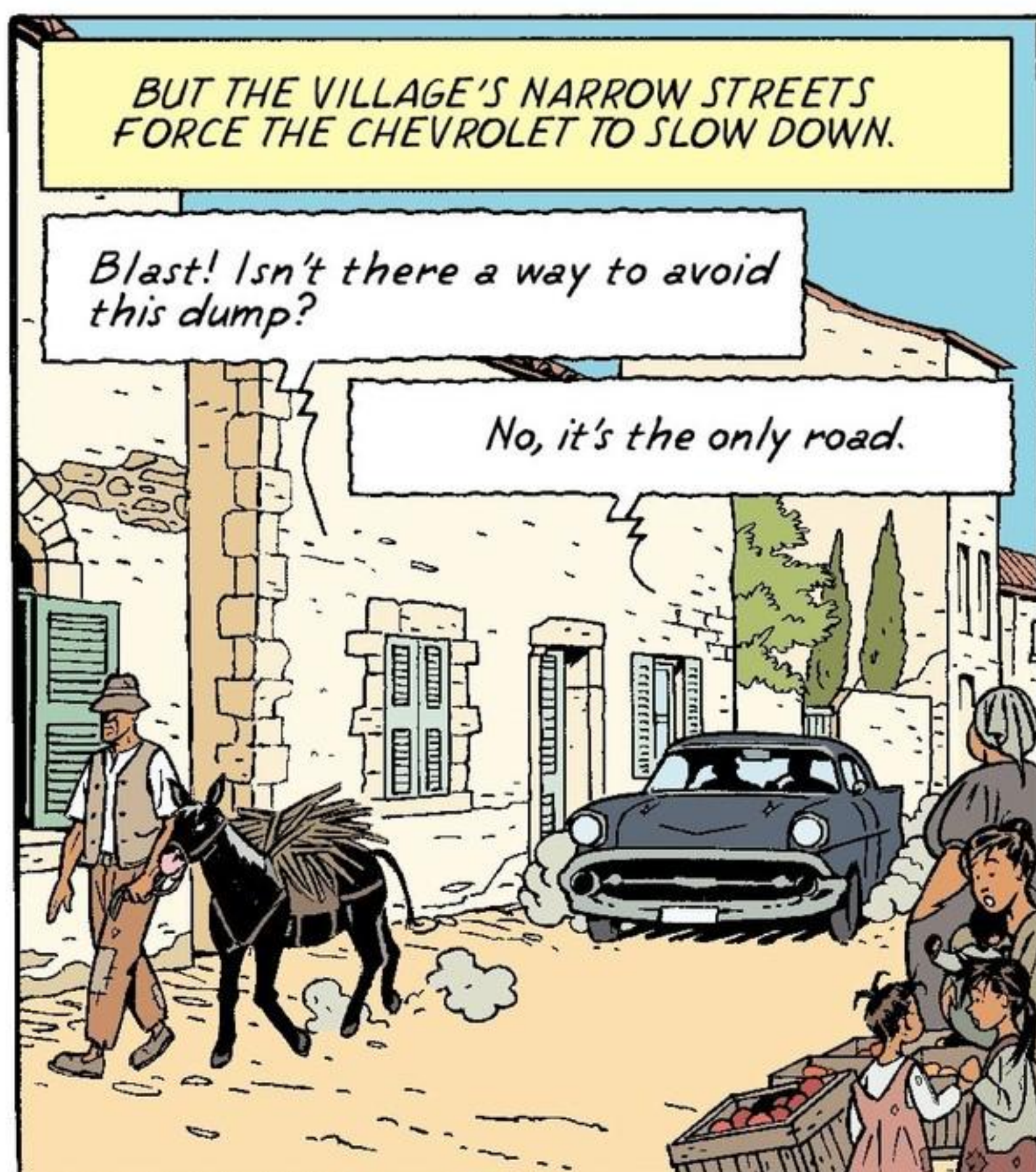
Unfortunately, as far as Nicodemus's island is concerned, the trail stops here. I searched the whole place again without finding any trace of the missing manuscript.

Hmm... How about we go pay a visit to the young goatherd who found this place?





*SEE THE MYSTERY OF THE GREAT PYRAMID.

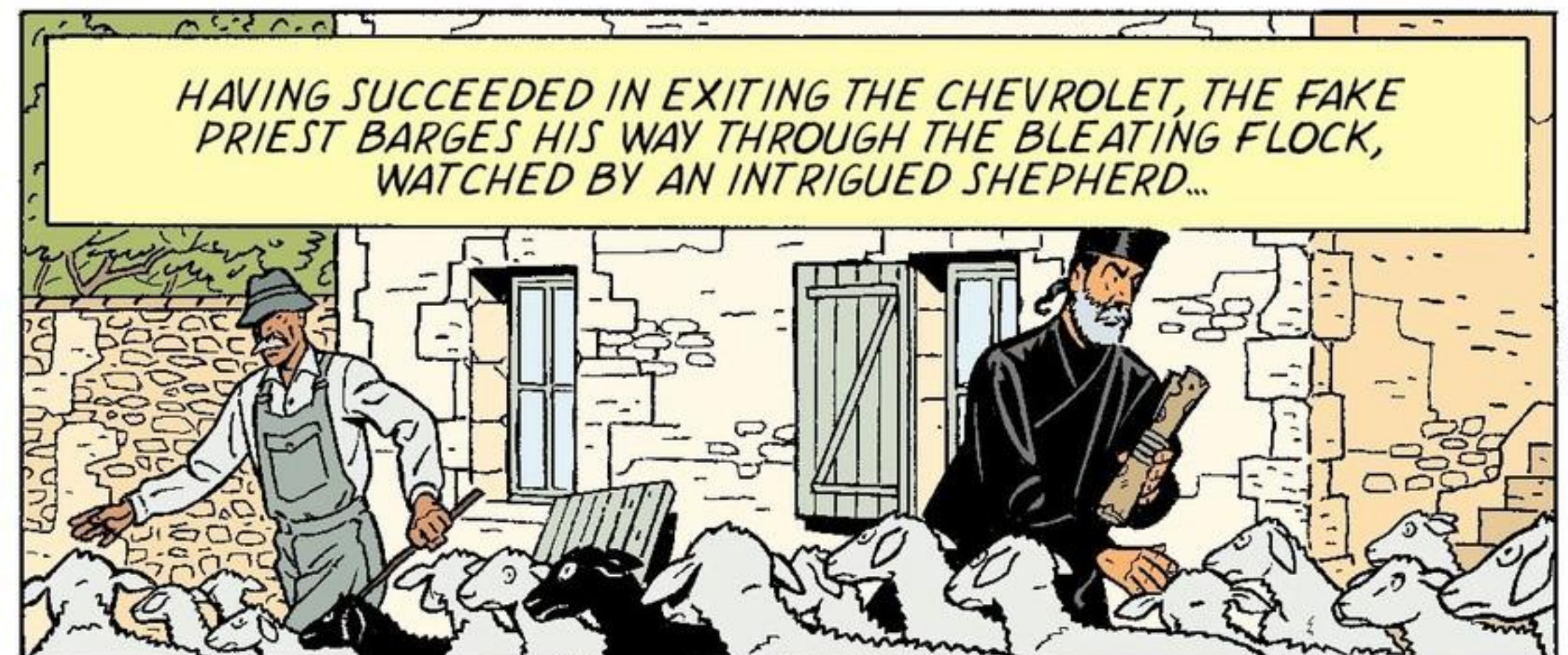




Hurrah! We've got them!



The devil take these damned animals! Take care of Mortimer... We'll meet up later!



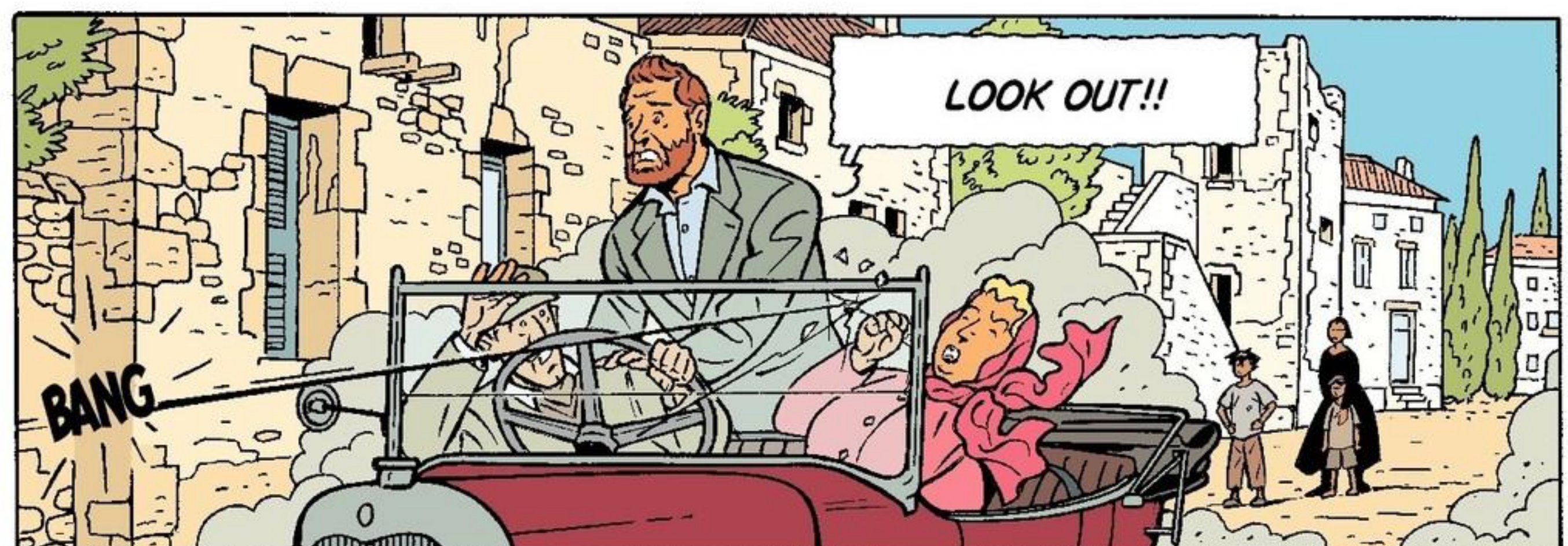
HAVING SUCCEEDED IN EXITING THE CHEVROLET, THE FAKE PRIEST BARGES HIS WAY THROUGH THE BLEATING FLOCK, WATCHED BY AN INTRIGUED SHEPHERD...



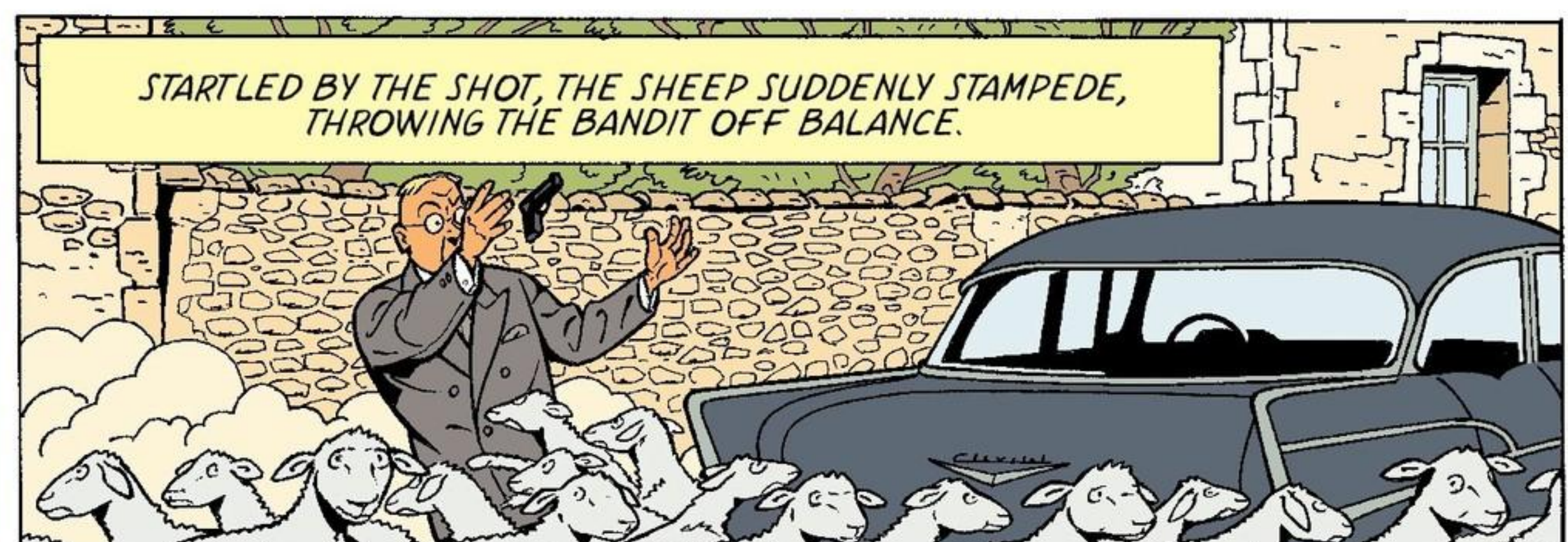
... WHILE JACK, GUN IN HAND, EXTRICATES HIMSELF FROM THE CAR WITH DIFFICULTY.



Oh, my!
He has a gun!



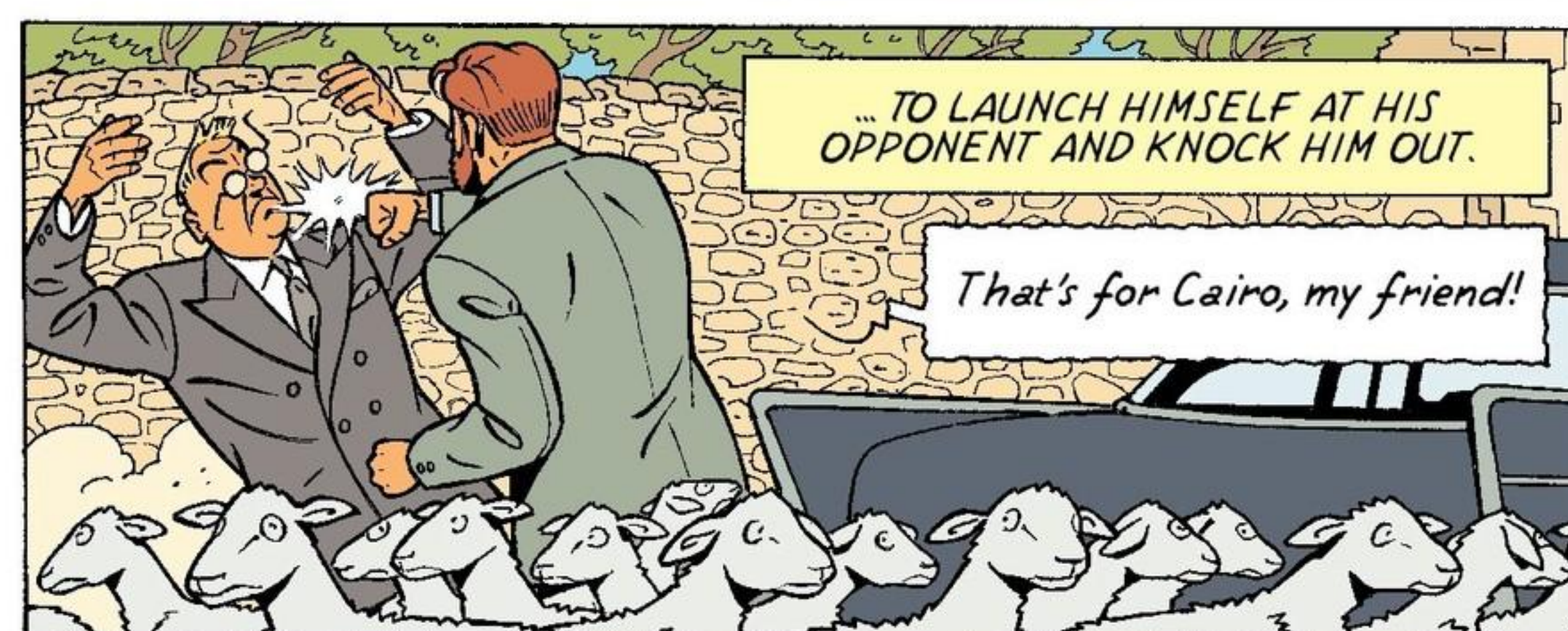
LOOK OUT!!



STARTLED BY THE SHOT, THE SHEEP SUDDENLY STAMPEDE, THROWING THE BANDIT OFF BALANCE.

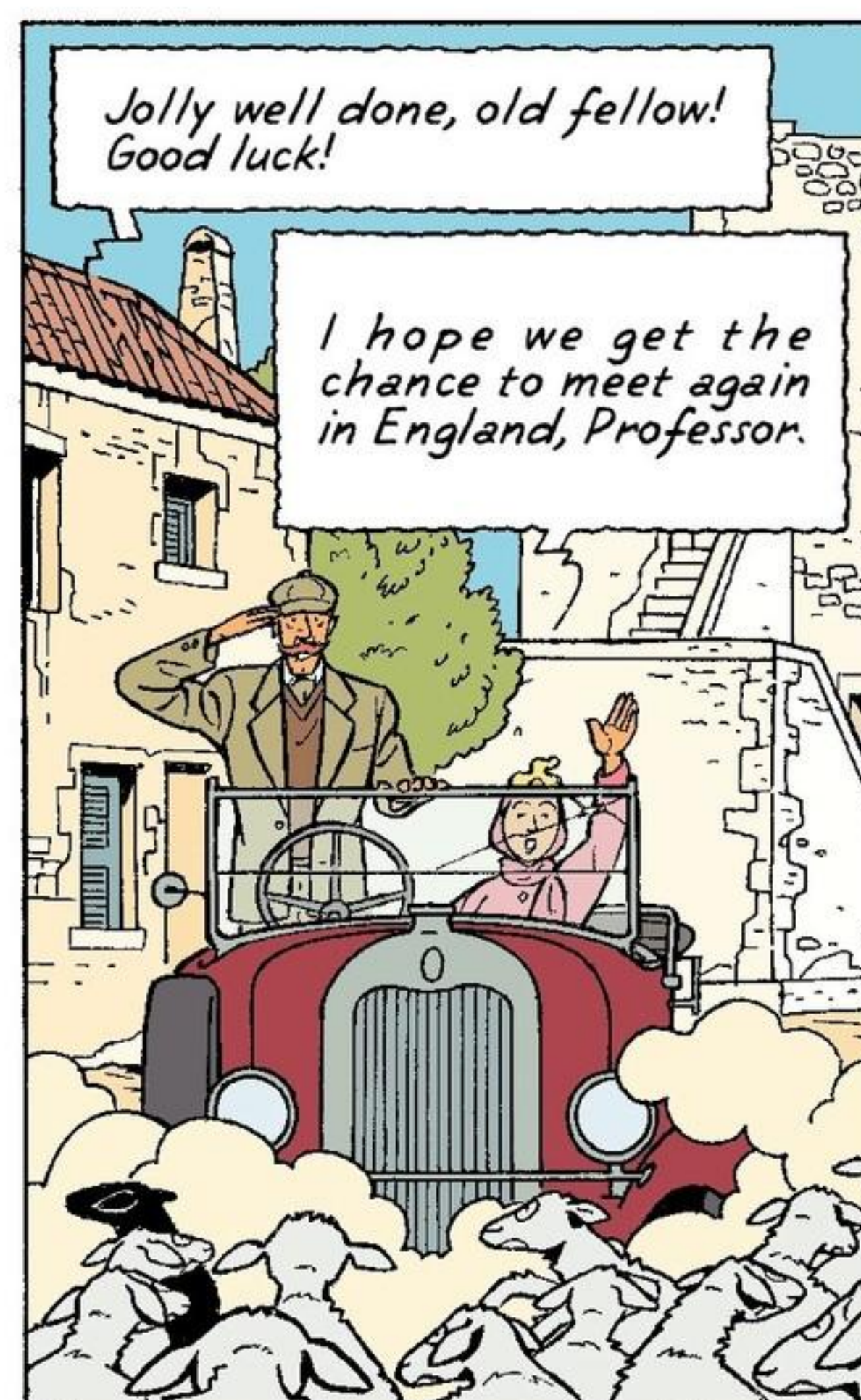


MORTIMER SEIZES HIS CHANCE...



... TO LAUNCH HIMSELF AT HIS OPPONENT AND KNOCK HIM OUT.

That's for Cairo, my friend!

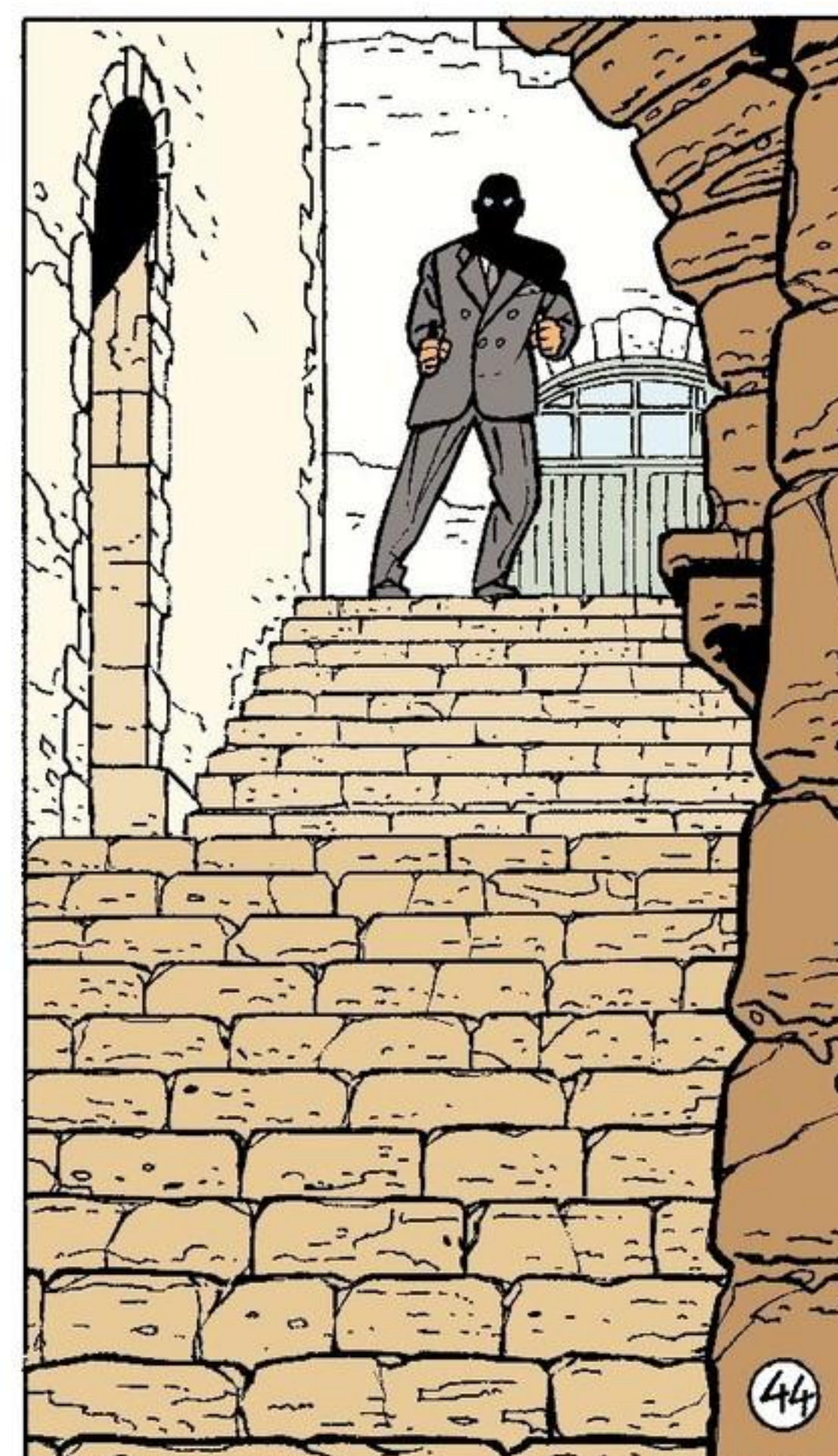
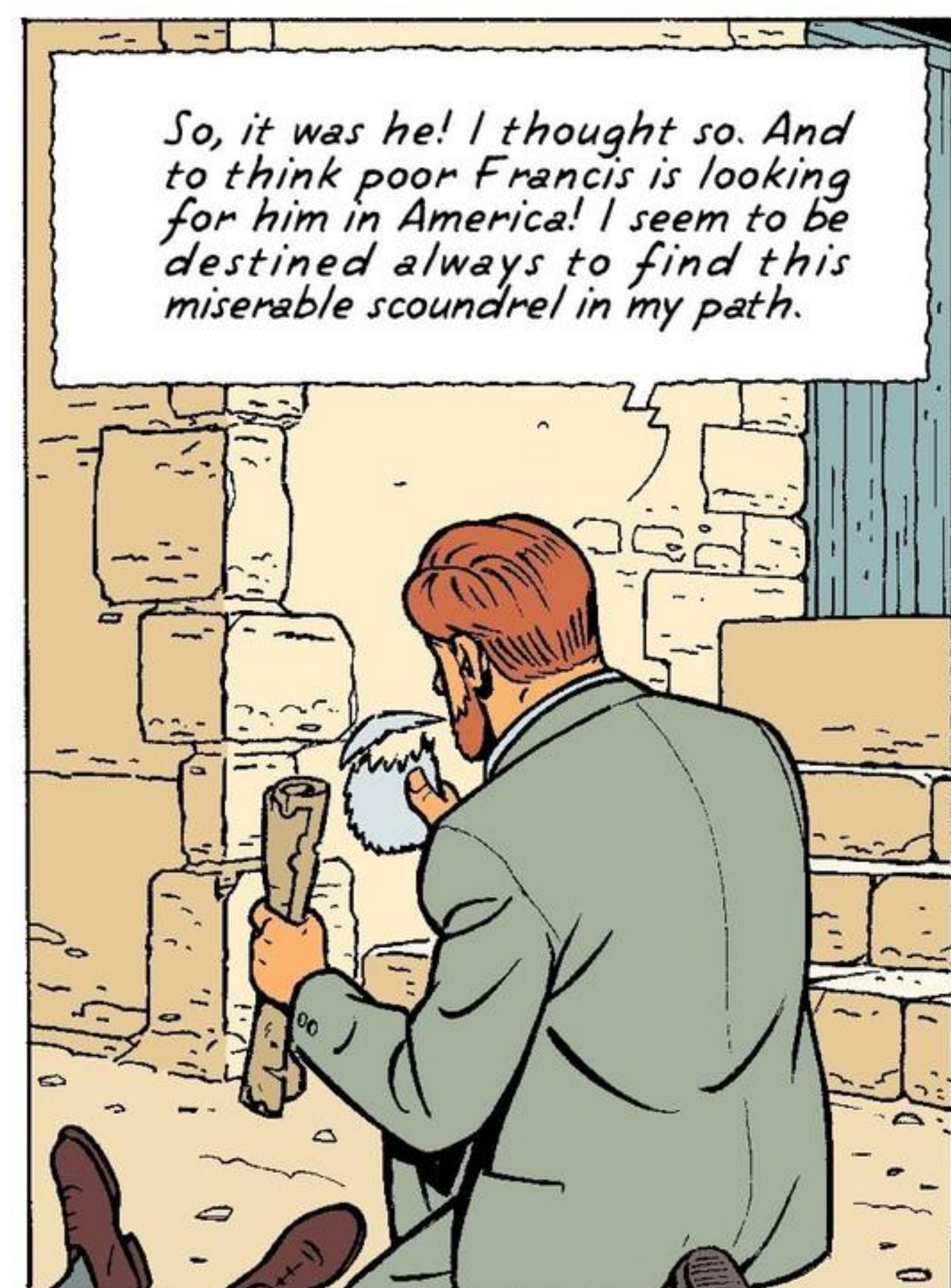
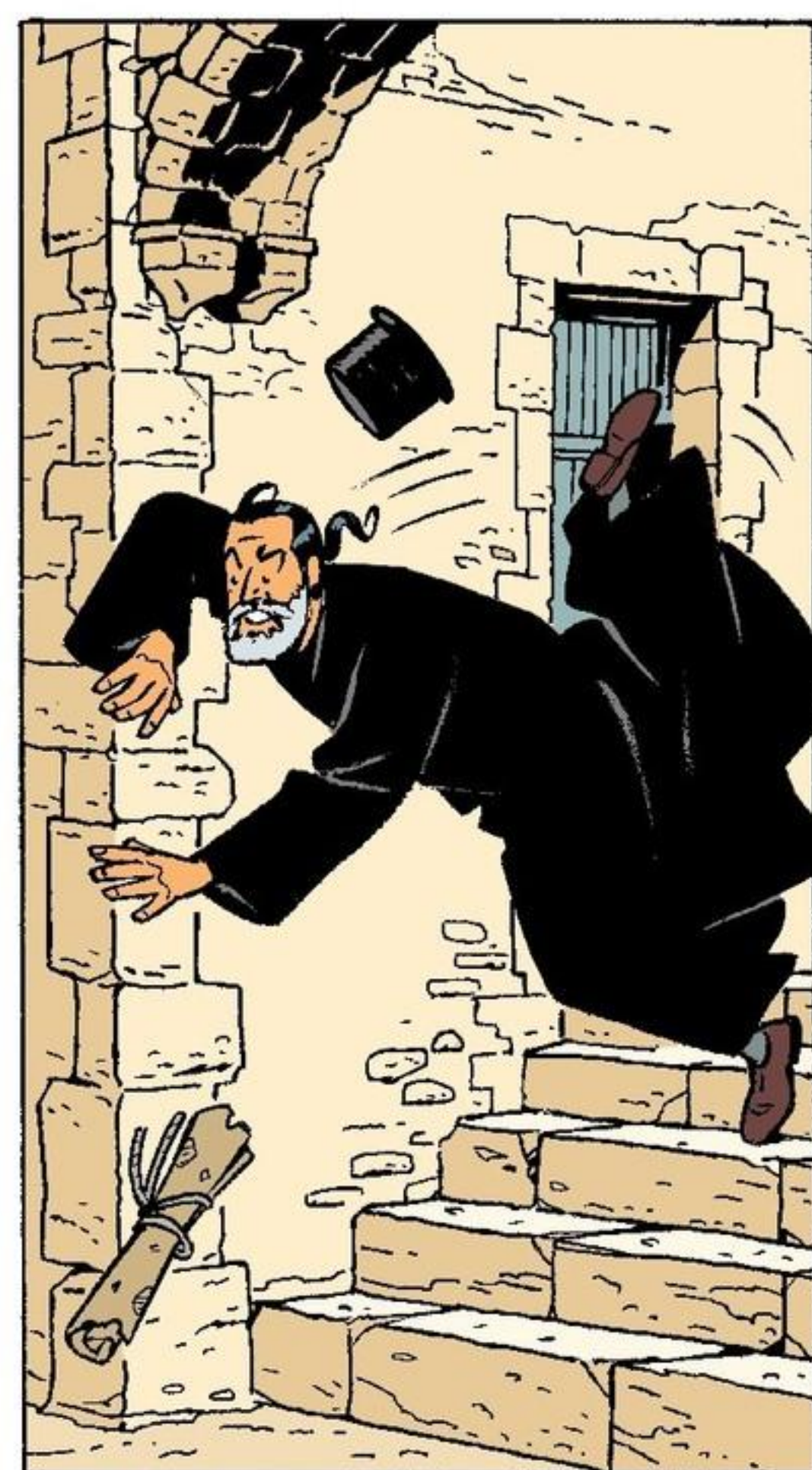
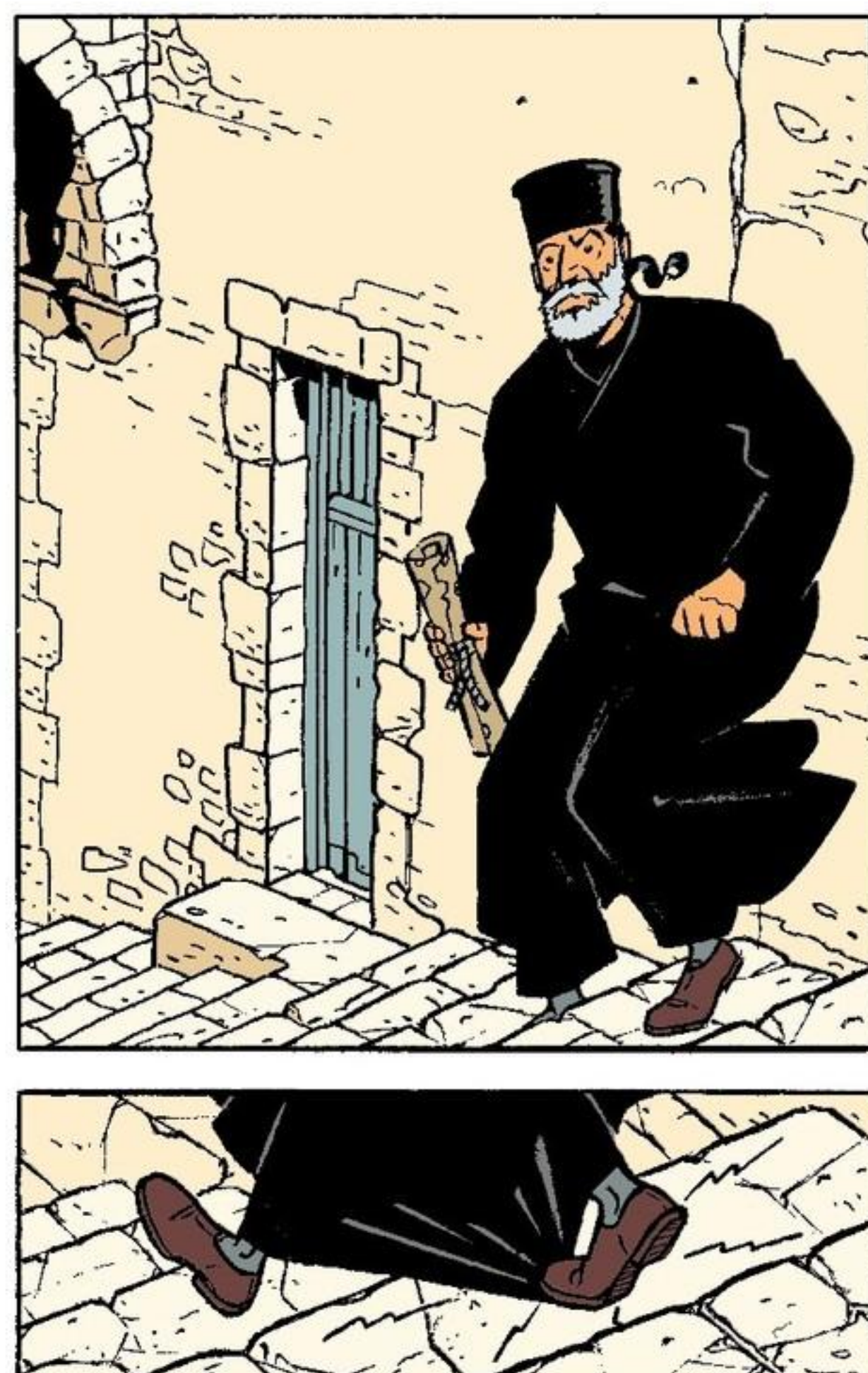
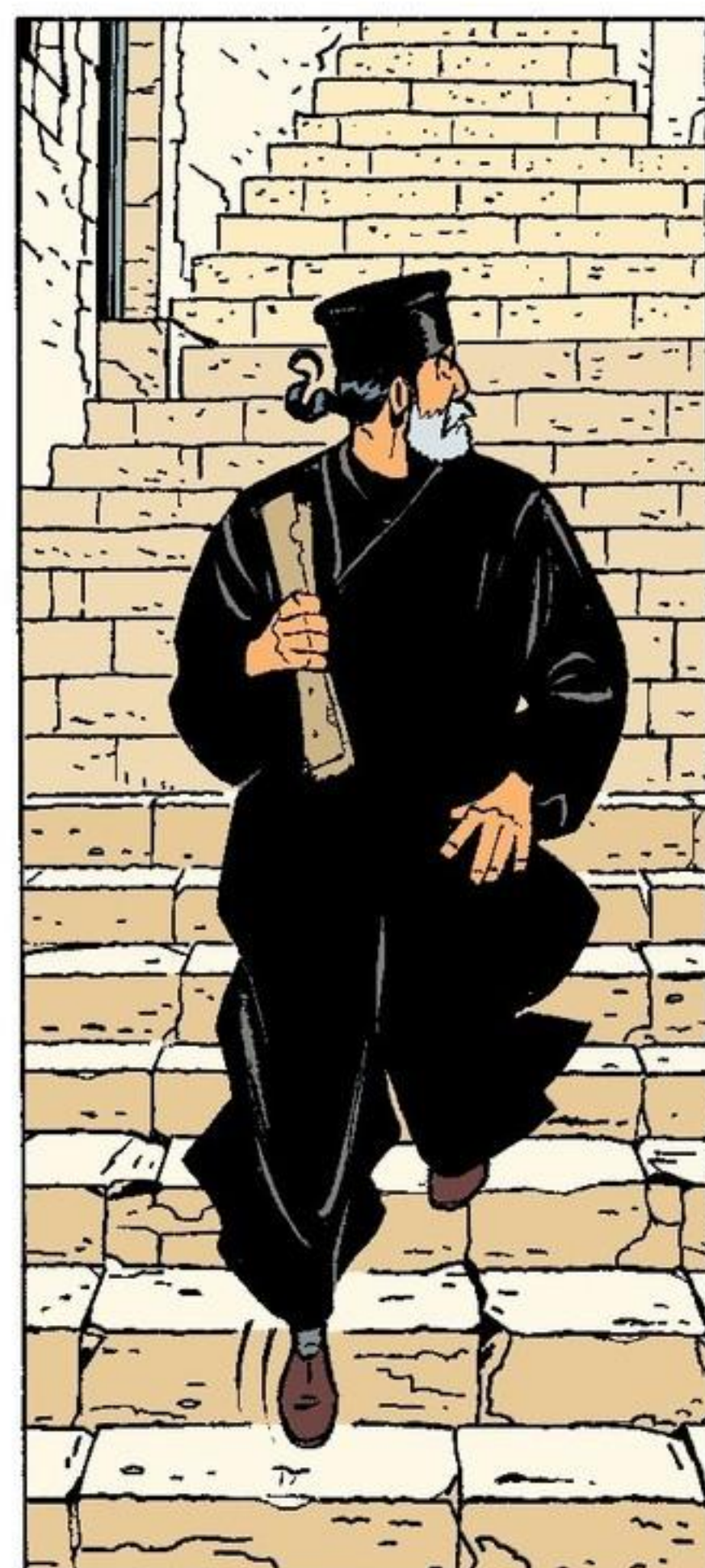


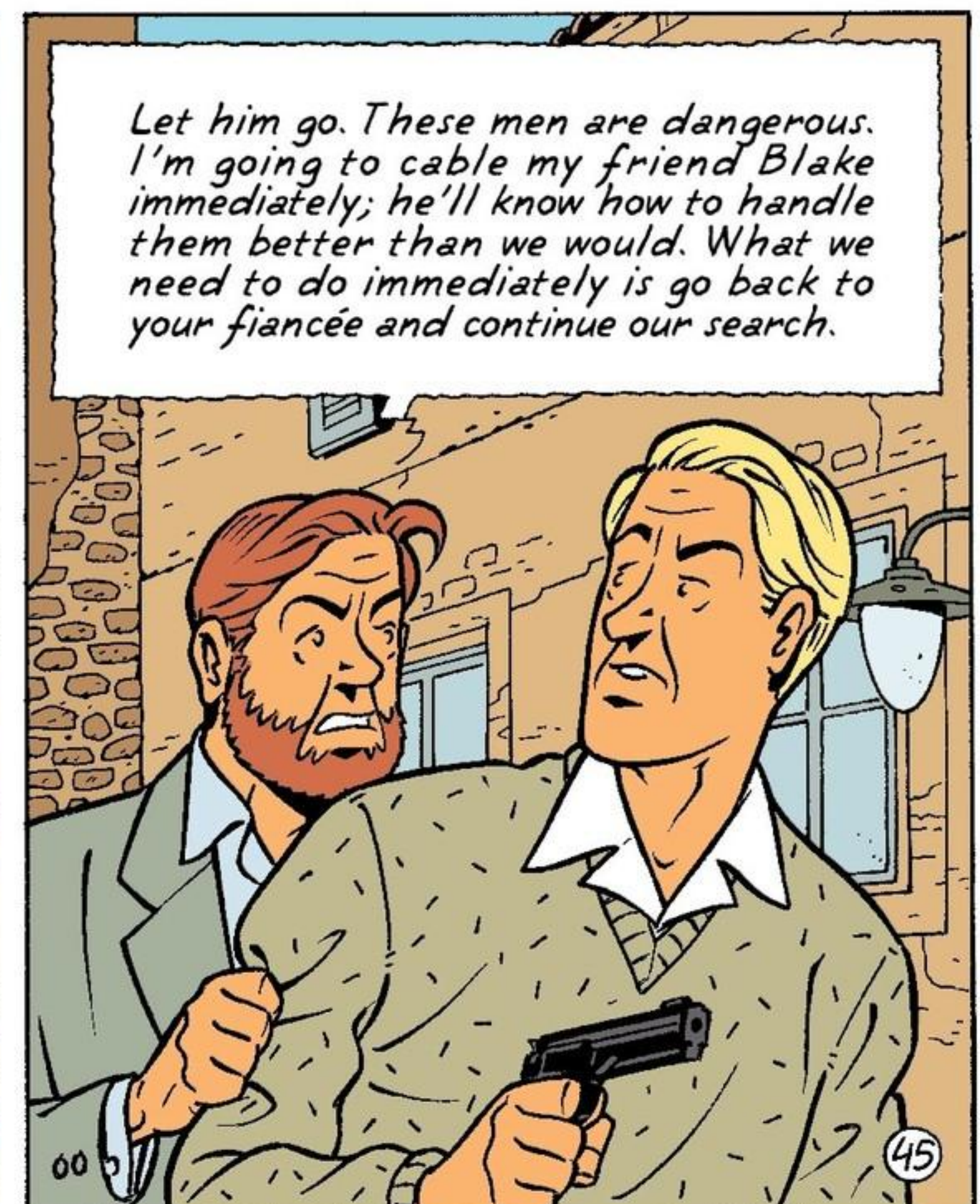
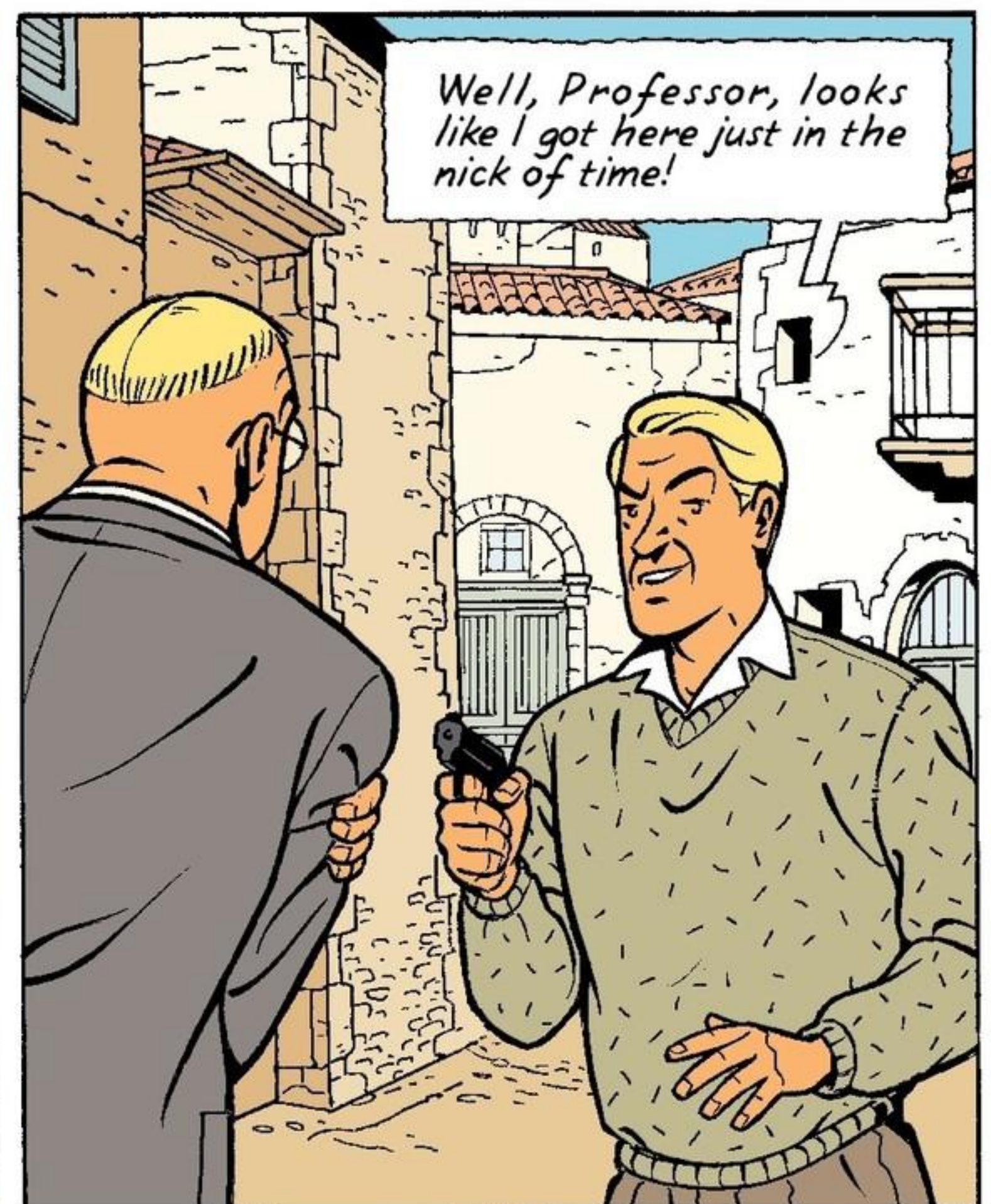
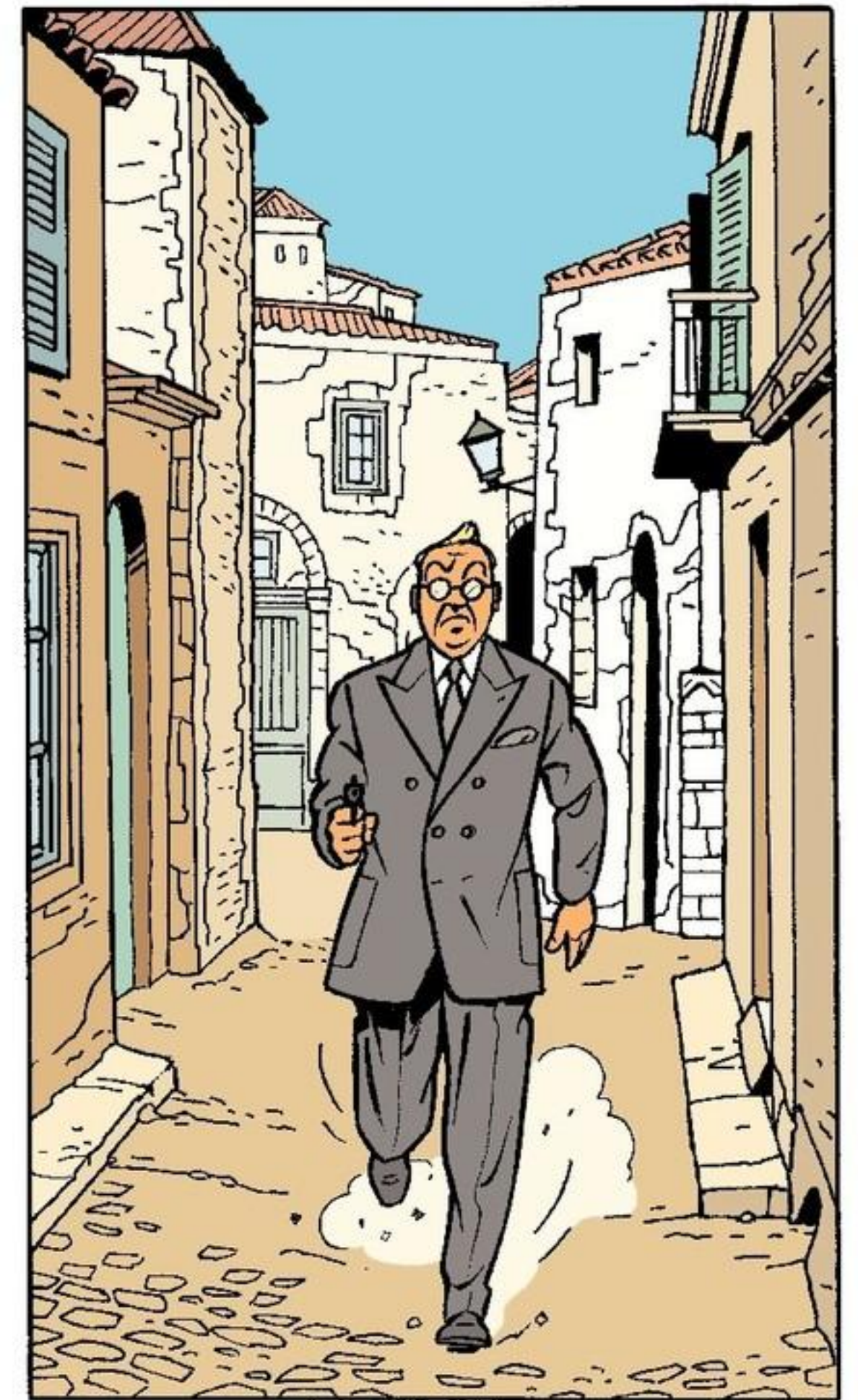
Jolly well done, old fellow!
Good luck!

I hope we get the
chance to meet again
in England, Professor.



MEANWHILE,
THE FAKE PRIEST
SLIPS INTO
A NARROW
SIDE ALLEY...





A FEW HOURS LATER, OUR FRIENDS ARE RECOVERING FROM ALL THE EXCITEMENT BY ENJOYING SOME DELICIOUS GRILLED FISH NEAR THE SHORE OF A LOVELY LITTLE COVE.

The scroll you risked your life to recover is, indeed, the missing part of Nicodemus's text.

After I released those poor people, little Petros confessed he'd taken the scroll from the chapel to show his mother. And she kept it, thinking that no one would notice its disappearance and that she might be able to sell it to a tourist. The poor woman cried with shame as she told me.

And I imagine that when Olrik presented himself dressed as a priest, they welcomed him with open arms.

Of course. And, after easily subduing and tying them up, he had no trouble forcing them to admit they had the manuscript. The poor woman begged me not to tell the police, which I agreed not to do.

You did well. It seems some ill-intentioned higher power is making sure that that blasted "colonel" keeps trying to cross paths with me, no matter where in the world I go. I don't know whom he's working for this time, but it seems obvious that he's working towards the same goal we are: to find Judas's grave and the 29 pieces of silver it's supposed to contain.

I cabled my friend Blake at the FBI headquarters in Washington this morning. No doubt he'll be as surprised as I was to learn of that blasted villain's presence here in Greece. It'll be up to him to find out how he managed to make his way here after his escape from the Jacksonville penitentiary.

That still leaves one unpleasant question unanswered. Whoever Olrik is being paid by this time, how can those devils know all the details of our research and movements? It's obvious that someone's keeping them informed daily. But who?

My uncle, Jim, myself and you are the only ones to know of the existence of the denarius and the manuscripts found in the chapel. No other member of the museum staff knows.

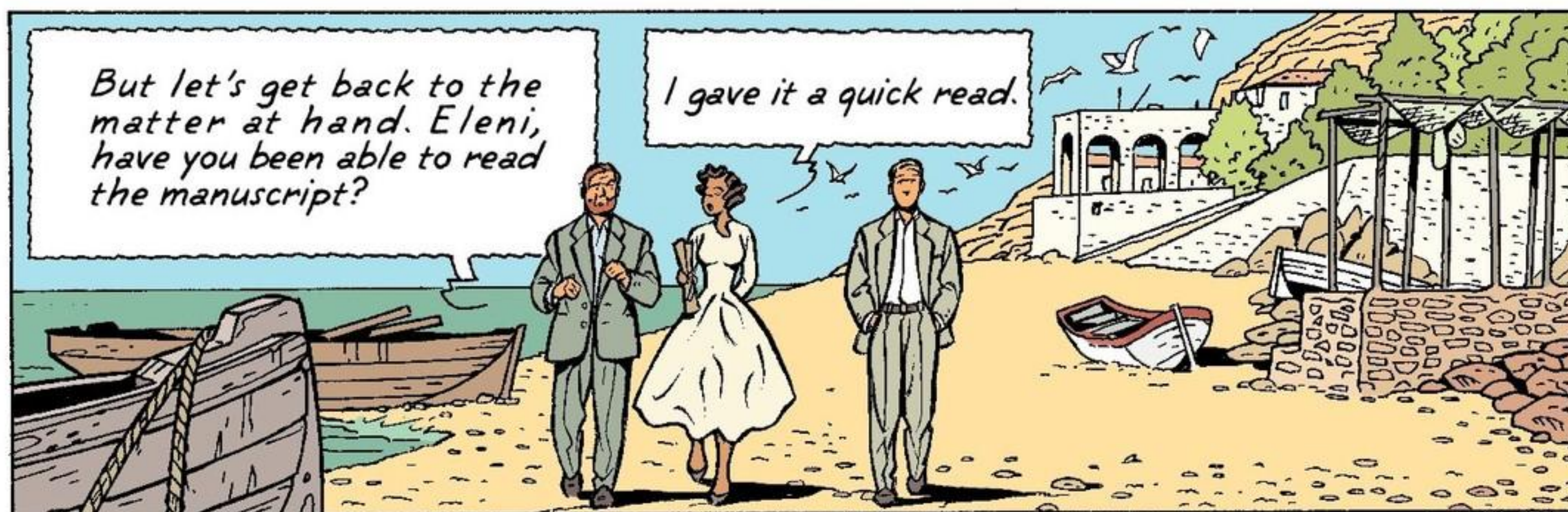
And also, of course, Bill Evans, the editor-in-chief of the Philadelphia Chronicle, who's funding your research in exchange for an exclusive on your discoveries.

Has your newspaper already published anything on the subject?

No. I cable them regular reports, but they're waiting until we're near our goal before they print anything.

Besides, I can't imagine good old Bill spilling the beans. He'd strangle his own mother-in-law for a scoop, but not for money.

Still, I'd rather you stopped sending him your reports for a few days, Jim. You never know.



But let's get back to the matter at hand. Eleni, have you been able to read the manuscript?

I gave it a quick read.



Nicodemus wrote of his origins, and how his little Christian community fled Nero's persecutions and sought refuge on their island.

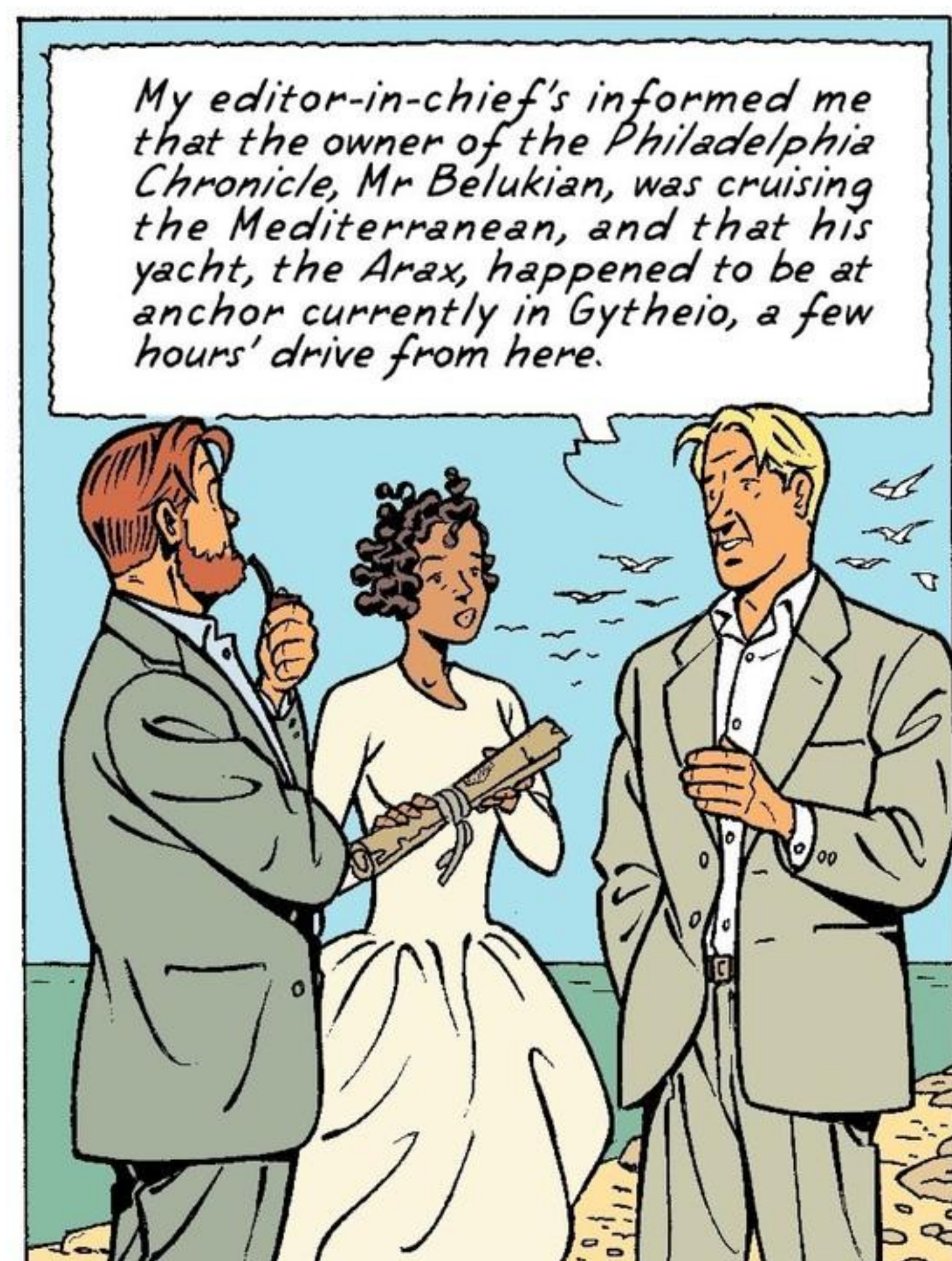
Does he give the name of the island? That's what really matters to us, after all.



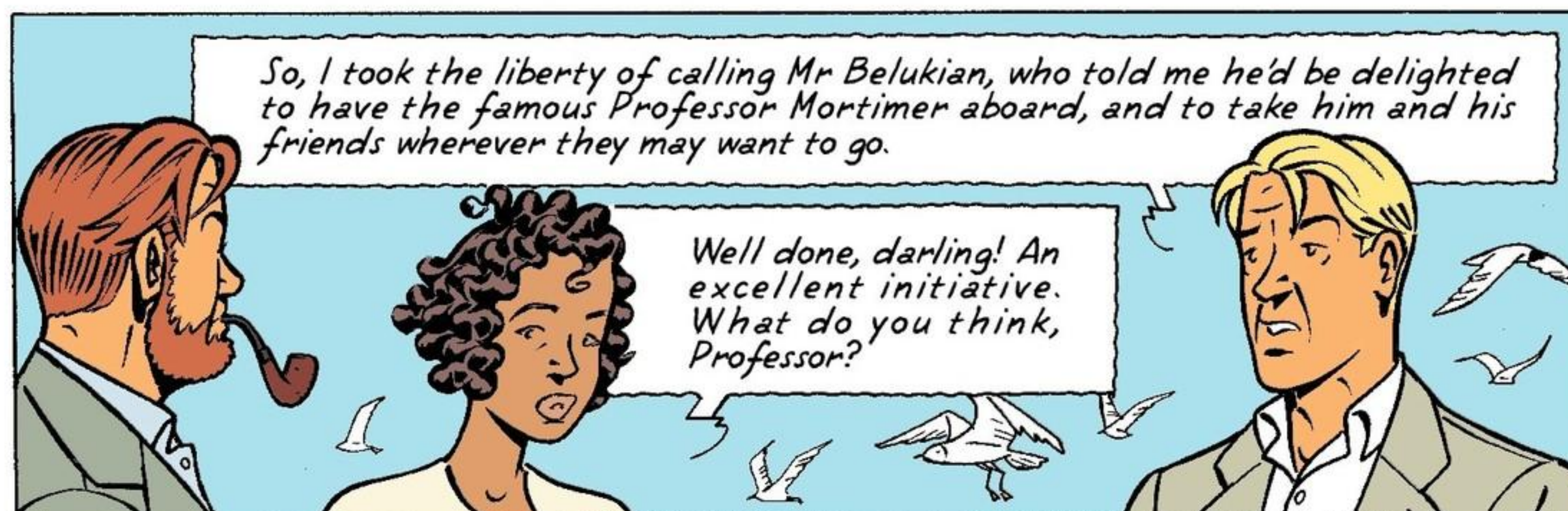
Yes: Syrenios. I checked the map. It's a small, isolated island in the Cretan Sea, away from established sea lanes.

So, that's where we'll need to go if we want to learn more. Jim, did you manage to find us a boat?

I did one better...



My editor-in-chief's informed me that the owner of the Philadelphia Chronicle, Mr Belukian, was cruising the Mediterranean, and that his yacht, the Arax, happened to be at anchor currently in Gytheio, a few hours' drive from here.



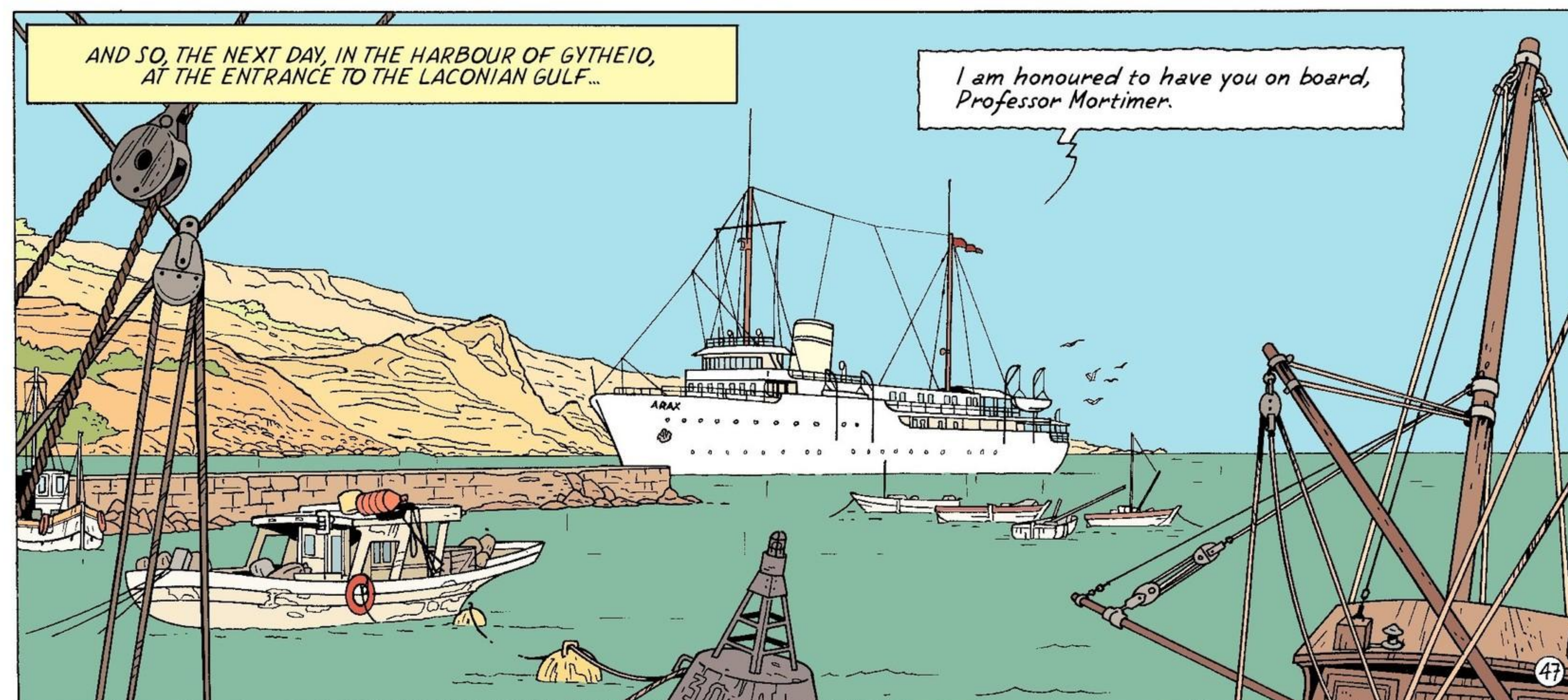
So, I took the liberty of calling Mr Belukian, who told me he'd be delighted to have the famous Professor Mortimer aboard, and to take him and his friends wherever they may want to go.

Well done, darling! An excellent initiative. What do you think, Professor?



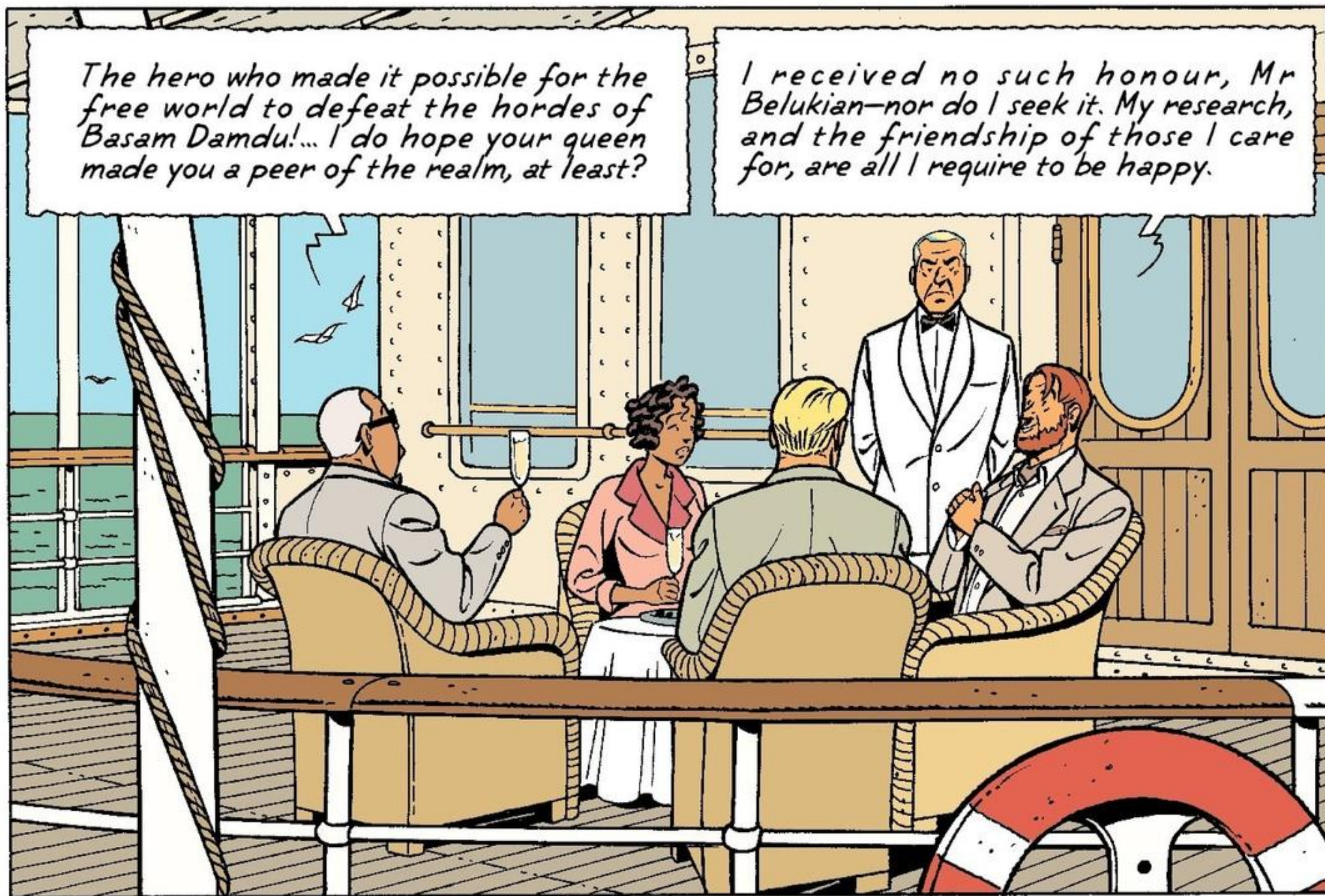
I think this is a fortunate coincidence. But let's remain careful and speak to no one of our next destination. That devil Olrik and his employers probably have ears everywhere.

Take it easy, Professor! With Jim Radcliff at your side, the bandits will find they're in for a fight. As you've already seen for yourself, actually.



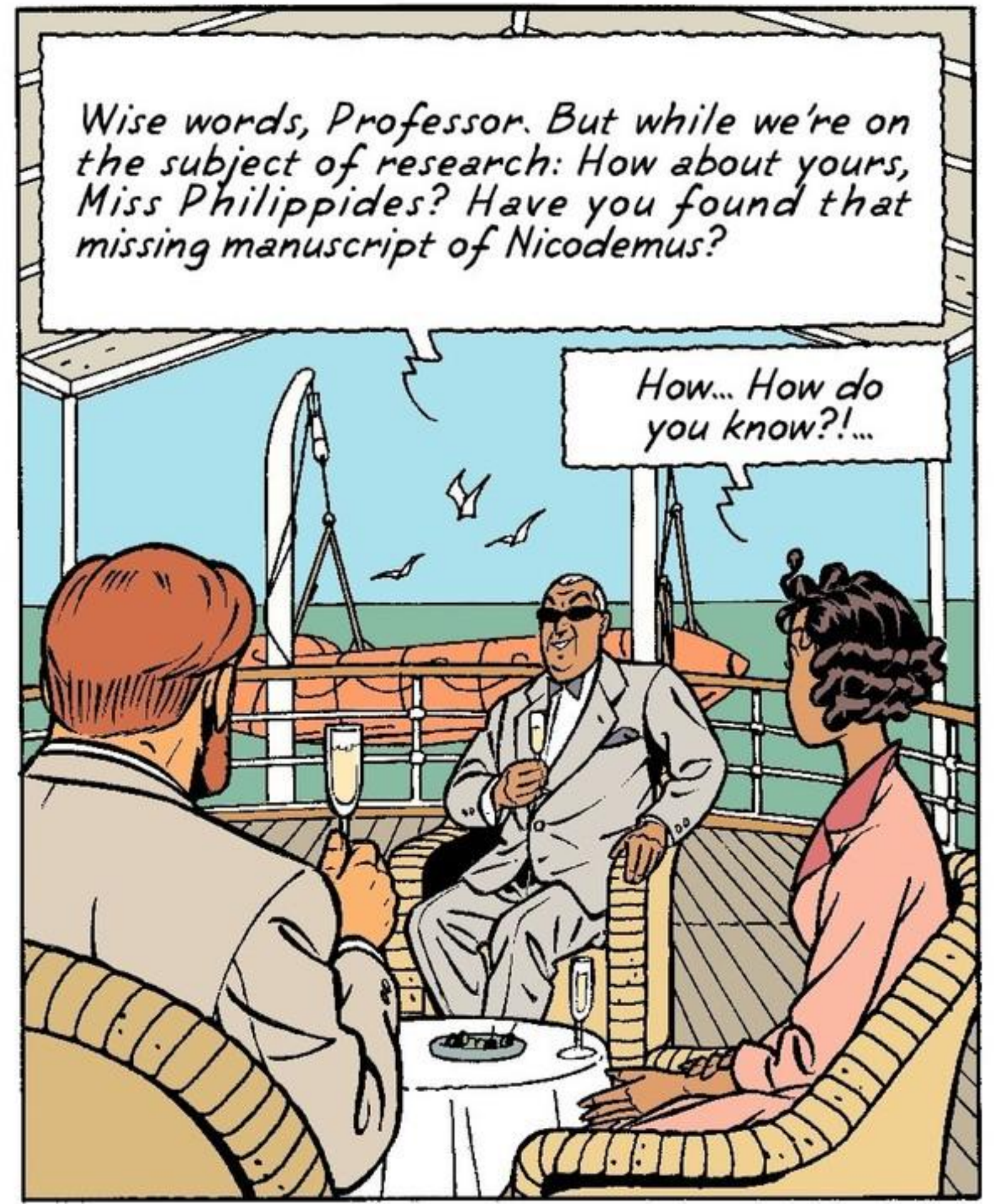
AND SO, THE NEXT DAY, IN THE HARBOUR OF GYTHEIO, AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE LACONIAN GULF...

I am honoured to have you on board, Professor Mortimer.



The hero who made it possible for the free world to defeat the hordes of Basam Damdu!... I do hope your queen made you a peer of the realm, at least?

I received no such honour, Mr Belukian—nor do I seek it. My research, and the friendship of those I care for, are all I require to be happy.

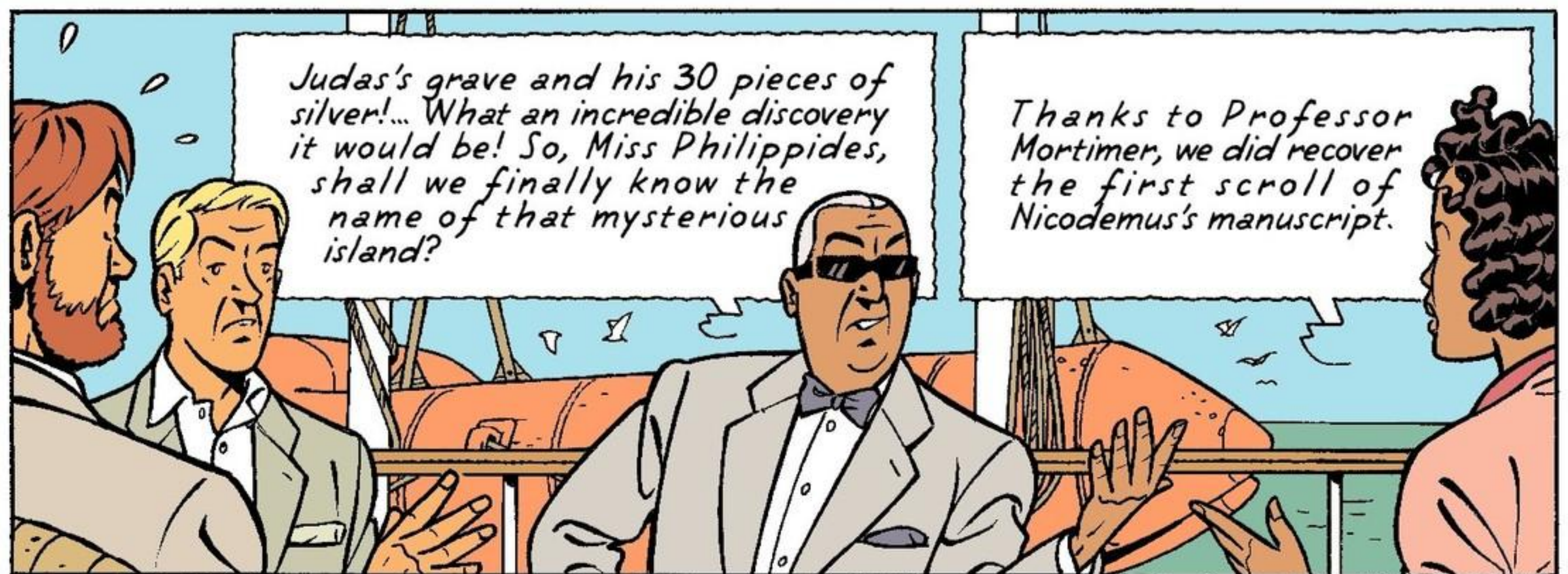


Wise words, Professor. But while we're on the subject of research: How about yours, Miss Philippides? Have you found that missing manuscript of Nicodemus?

How... How do you know?!...



Ha! Ha! Ha!... My dear, you're forgetting that it's my newspaper that's funding your project. Bill Evans, the editor-in-chief of the Philadelphia Chronicle, regularly forwards me the reports from your fiancé here. Because I, too, am captivated by this adventure.



Judas's grave and his 30 pieces of silver!... What an incredible discovery it would be! So, Miss Philippides, shall we finally know the name of that mysterious island?

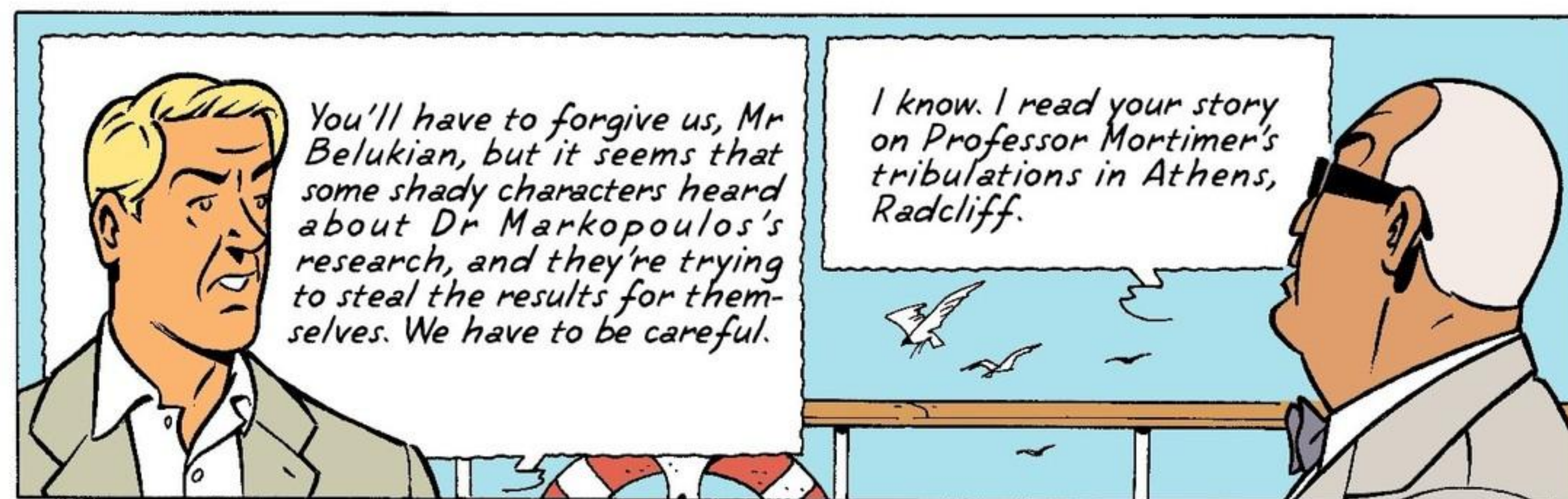
Thanks to Professor Mortimer, we did recover the first scroll of Nicodemus's manuscript.



CATCHING A DISCREET WARNING GESTURE FROM MORTIMER, THE YOUNG WOMAN STOPS, HESITANT.

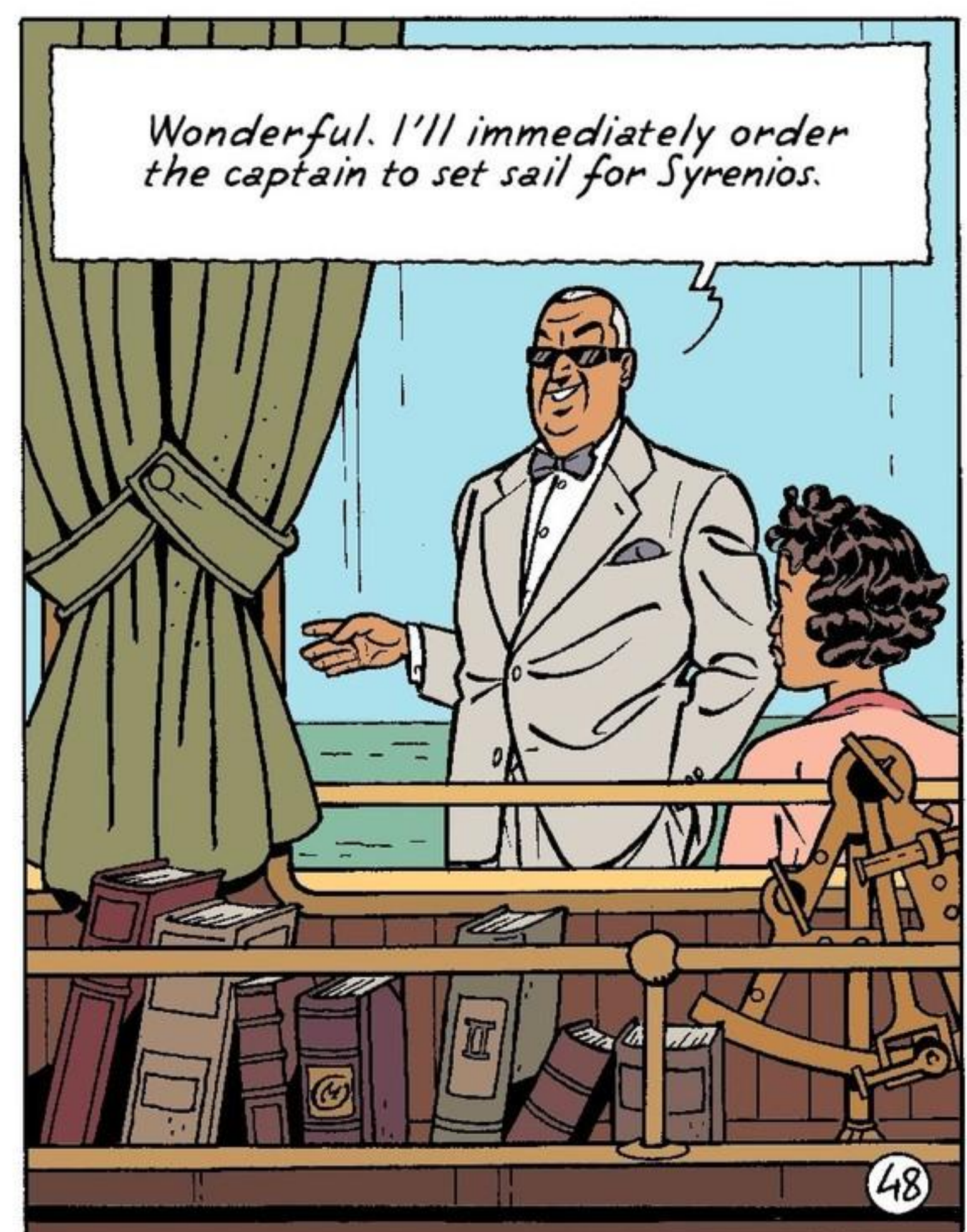


Well?...

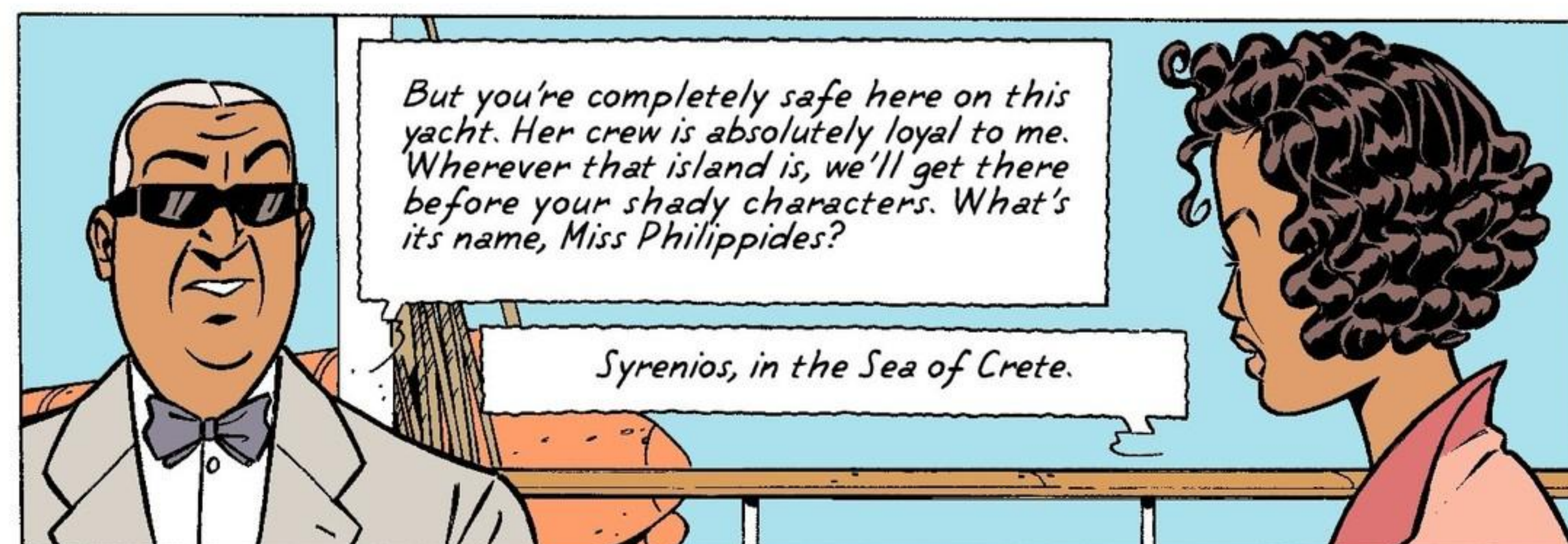


You'll have to forgive us, Mr Belukian, but it seems that some shady characters heard about Dr Markopoulos's research, and they're trying to steal the results for themselves. We have to be careful.

I know. I read your story on Professor Mortimer's tribulations in Athens, Radcliff.



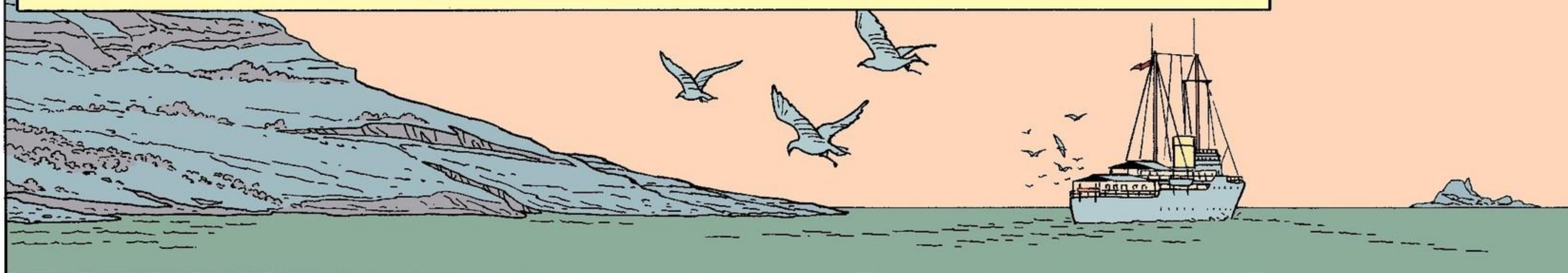
Wonderful. I'll immediately order the captain to set sail for Syrenios.



But you're completely safe here on this yacht. Her crew is absolutely loyal to me. Wherever that island is, we'll get there before your shady characters. What's its name, Miss Philippides?

Syrenios, in the Sea of Crete.

A FEW HOURS LATER, THE ARAX HAS WEIGHED ANCHOR. AND WHILE THE GREAT YACHT SAILS THROUGH THE KYTHIRIAN STRAITS BETWEEN THE SOUTHERNMOST TIP OF THE PELOPONNESE AND THE LEGENDARY ISLAND OF CYTHERA...



... ON THE DECK, MORTIMER IS BROODING OVER SOME DARK THOUGHTS.

There's something that bothers me about this Belukian's eagerness to help us in our search.



I don't much care for the man, either.



Not to mention his crew—as creepy a lot as I ever saw. But maybe I'm just letting my imagination run wild. Well, we'll see. Time to get changed for dinner.



BUT AS OUR FRIEND WALKS PAST THE DOOR OF A CABIN NEAR HIS OWN...

No... No...

?



No, please...

That voice!
It sounds like...



Dr Markopoulos?! Olnik!?!

Ah, Mortimer!... We've been expecting you.



Do come in, Professor. I'd hate to have to insist.

??





So, my instincts were correct. It's that Belukian character who's paying you, isn't it? What's his game, then?

The same as yours, dear fellow: a game of clues that will lead him to the grave of Judas Iscariot.



But why? What could possibly be in it for him?

If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. Belos Belukian, a.k.a. Count Rainer von Stahl, seems like a complete crackpot to me. But he's immensely rich, and just between you and me, that's all that matters.

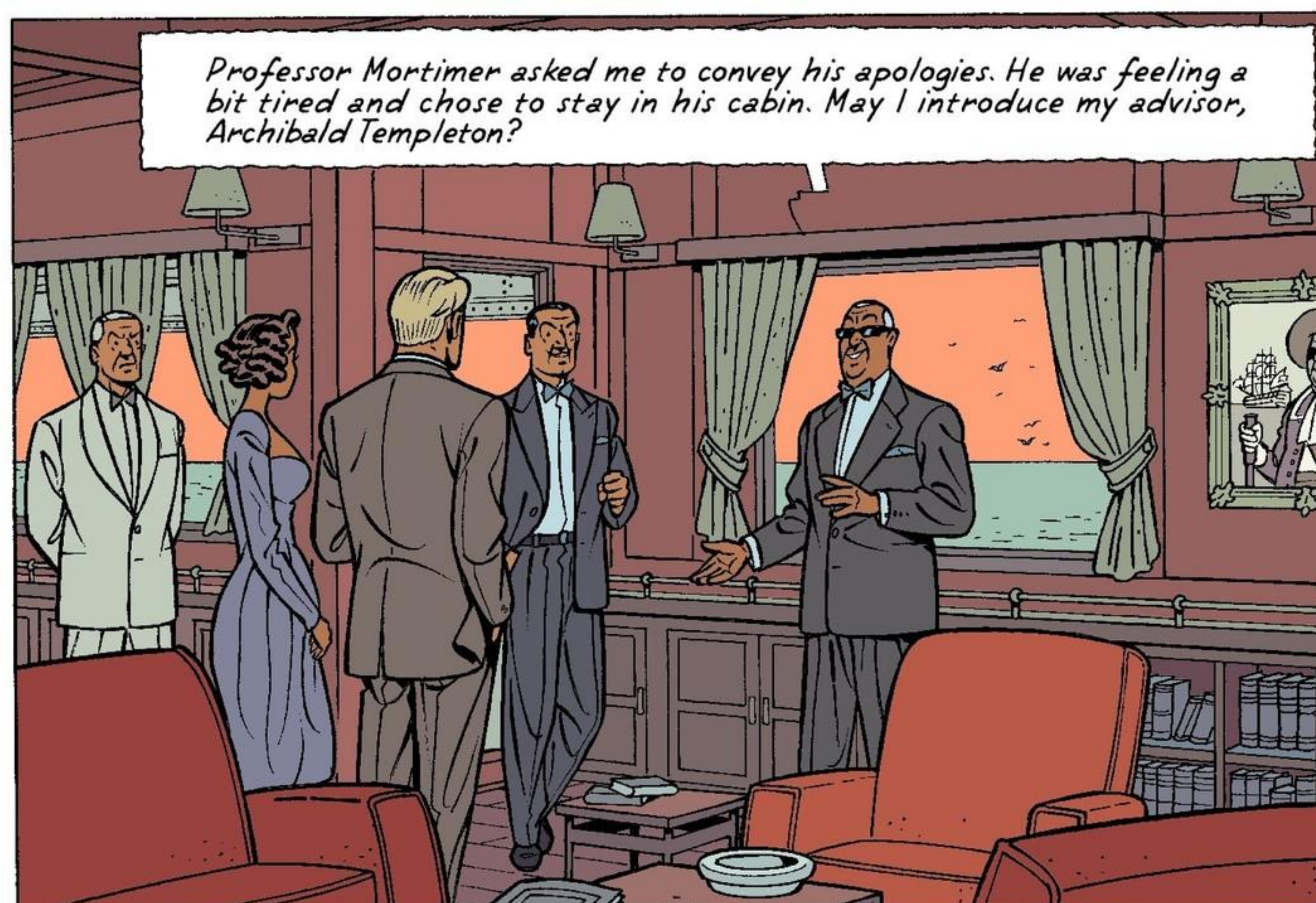


Therefore, I will help him acquire what he desires. Not to mention that it gives me the pleasure of having you at my mercy. As for the good Dr Markopoulos, now that his dear niece is also in our hands, he will no longer show any reluctance about giving us the combination to his safe at the museum. Isn't that so, Doctor?

You... You miserable bandit!



So I've been called many times, but I do not care. Do forgive me for leaving you, gentlemen, but I'm expected for dinner. And don't count on any help from your friends. In less than 30 minutes, they will no longer be a threat to us either. I wish you a pleasant night.



Professor Mortimer asked me to convey his apologies. He was feeling a bit tired and chose to stay in his cabin. May I introduce my advisor, Archibald Templeton?



How strange. I have a feeling I've met you before.

I don't believe so, Miss Philippides. If we had, no doubt I would have a dazzling memory of it.



I hope the professor isn't poorly?

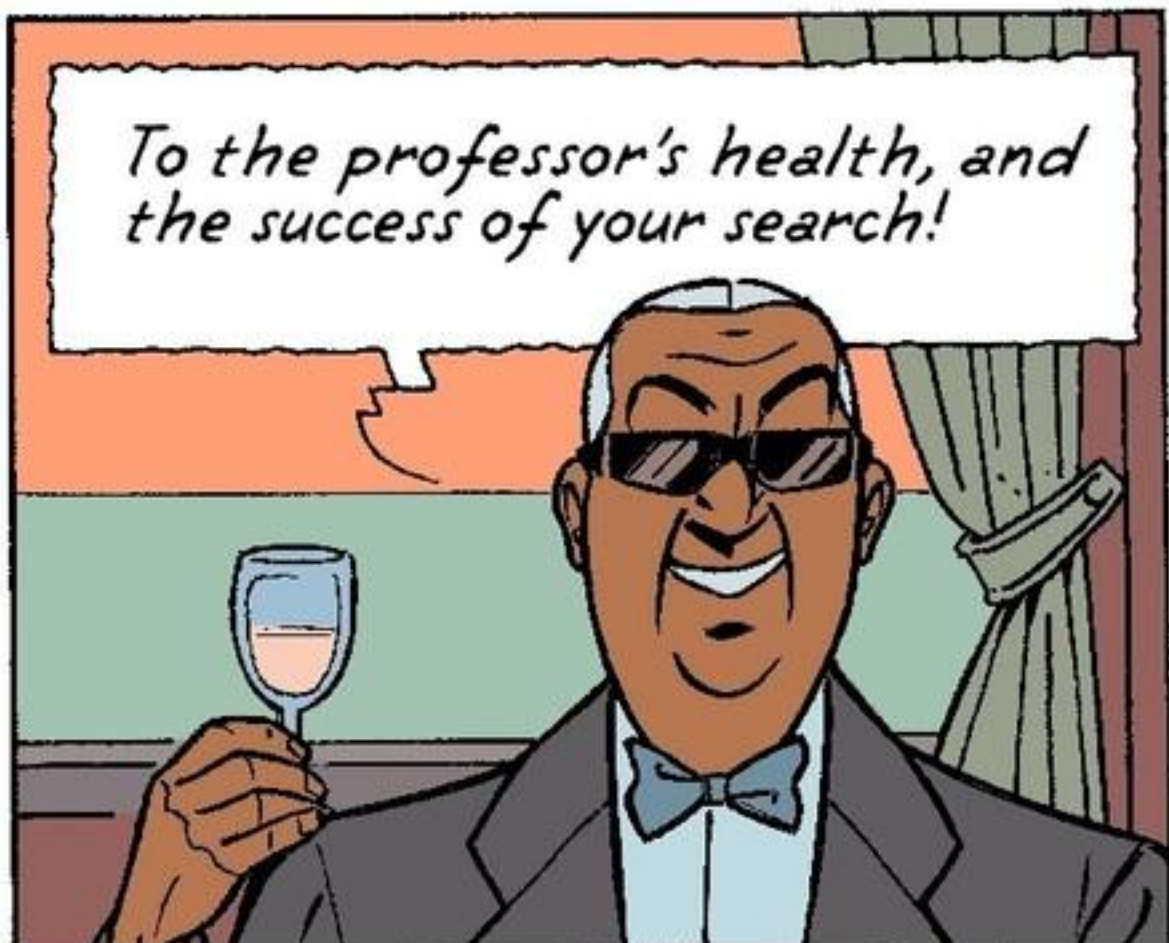
Have no fear. By tomorrow he'll be right as rain. While we wait for dinner, have a taste of this nice, little Laconian wine. From my personal reserve.



It's delicious. With... how to say it? ... a peculiar aftertaste.

Characteristic of this wine. Another glass, Radcliff?

With pleasure.



To the professor's health, and the success of your search!



Why don't you tell me something of that cave you're looking for, Miss Philippides... I read something about two entrances, is that right?

It is. One way in from the sea, and the other...



JIM?!? What is...?



I... I can't...



Perfect! Jack, have these two locked up in one of their cabins. After you take the Yankee's pistol away from him, of course.

Right away, sir.

Now that we have Markopoulos and his niece, we could get rid of Mortimer. I know him—all too well, in fact. He's likely to be more of a hindrance than a help.



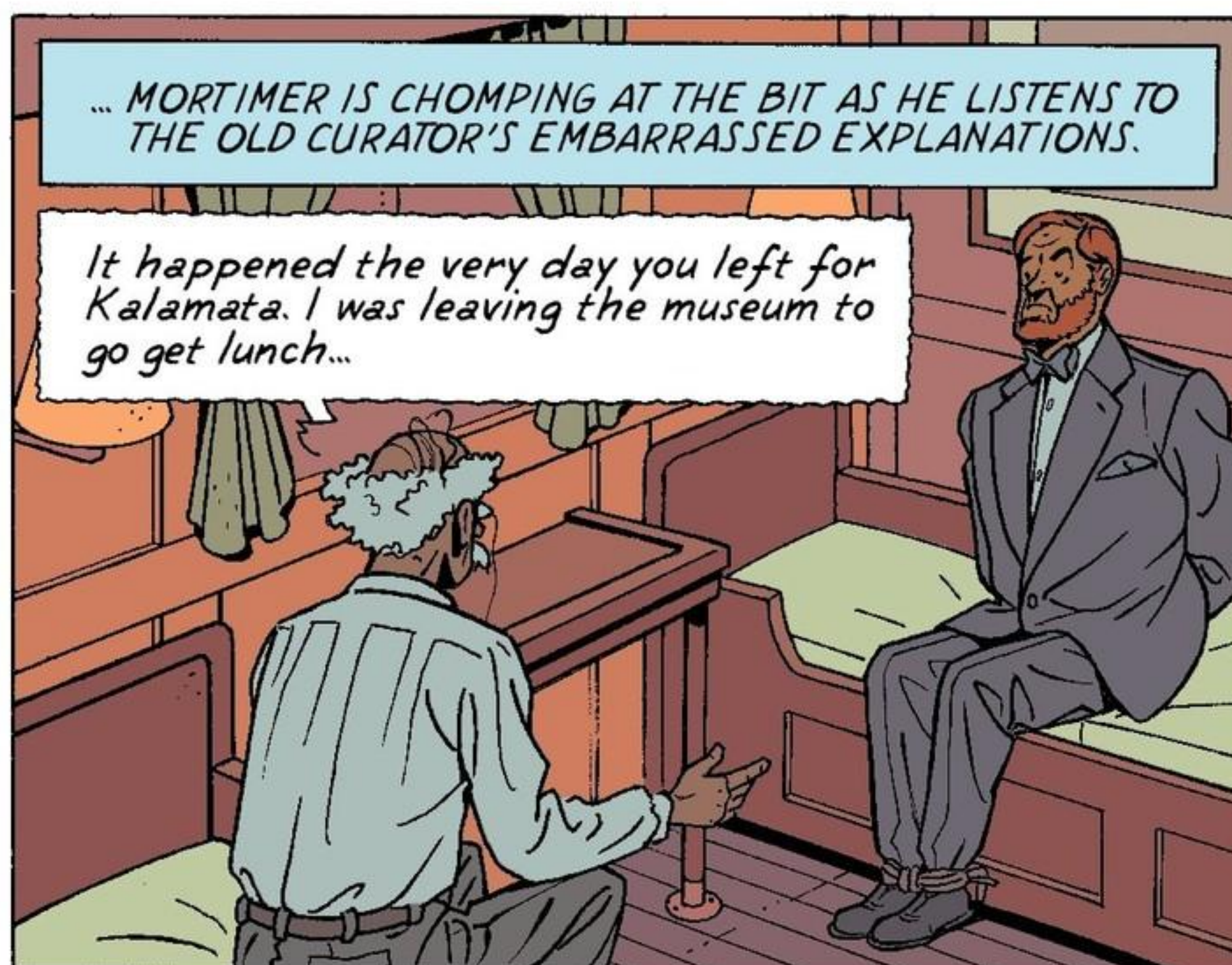
I know how much you hate him, Colonel. But the professor's scientific mind might prove useful. I forbid you to harm him in any way until further notice. Is that clear?

Crystal clear, Count von Stahl. Never mind—I will be patient.

NIGHT HAS FALLEN ON THE SEA OF CRETE, AND THE ARAX SAILS ON TOWARDS SYRENIOS. IN HIS CABIN...



... MORTIMER IS CHOMPING AT THE BIT AS HE LISTENS TO THE OLD CURATOR'S EMBARRASSED EXPLANATIONS.



It happened the very day you left for Kalamata. I was leaving the museum to go get lunch...

... when a man hidden in the back of my car suddenly covered my nose with a chloroformed rag.



I woke up here, wearing these handcuffs. I am truly sorry I dragged you into this debacle, Professor...



You couldn't have predicted what's happening to us, Doctor. For the moment, there's only one thing we should focus on: getting out of this trap. Try to untie me with your free hand.



I cannot do it with only one hand. Your bonds are too tight.

Then take the lighter in my jacket pocket and burn them.



But I could hurt you terribly...

We have little choice. Go ahead. I've been through worse!



AAAAAAH!



Well done, Doctor! Unfortunately, I can't return the favour with your handcuffs. But don't worry. I'll get you out of this.

What are you going to do?



I'll start with finding a way to leave this cabin. No doubt the door is locked, and...





STILL RATHER SURPRISED TO HAVE FOUND THE CABIN DOOR UNLOCKED, MORTIMER CAREFULLY CLIMBS UP TO THE YACHT'S DECK.

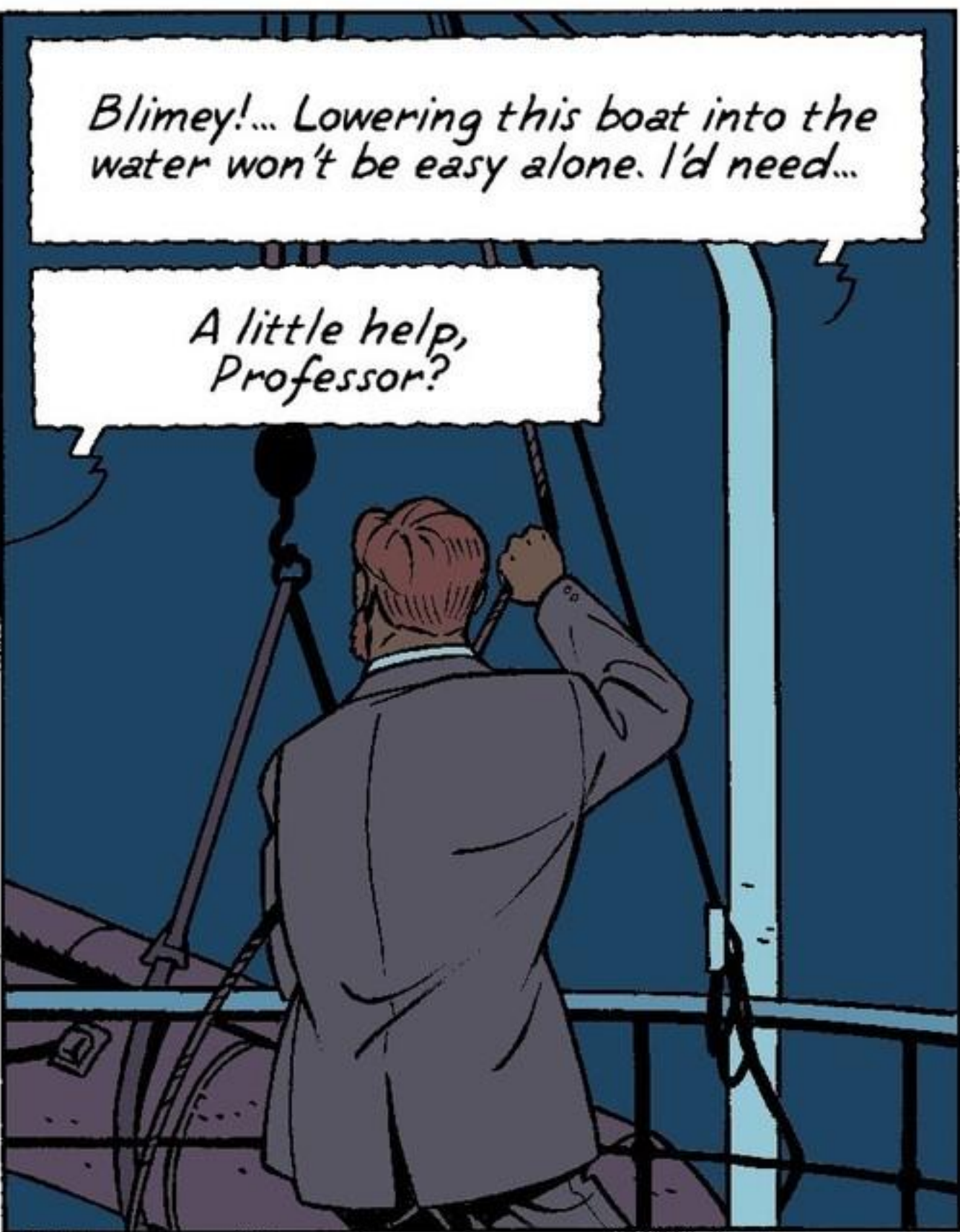


FORTUNATELY, IT APPEARS DESERTED.

Everyone must be asleep, save for the sailor on duty at the helm. Getting Eleni and Jim seems too risky a proposition; I don't see myself taking over the whole ship alone and with no weapons.



My only chance: to leave the Arax in this lifeboat and trust my luck to find help.



Blimey!... Lowering this boat into the water won't be easy alone. I'd need...

A little help, Professor?



Damn! Olrik!!

Come, now, don't make such a face. We're here to help you escape. Wasn't I kind enough to leave the door to your cabin unlocked? Get in that dinghy, Professor. Jack and I will take care of lowering it.

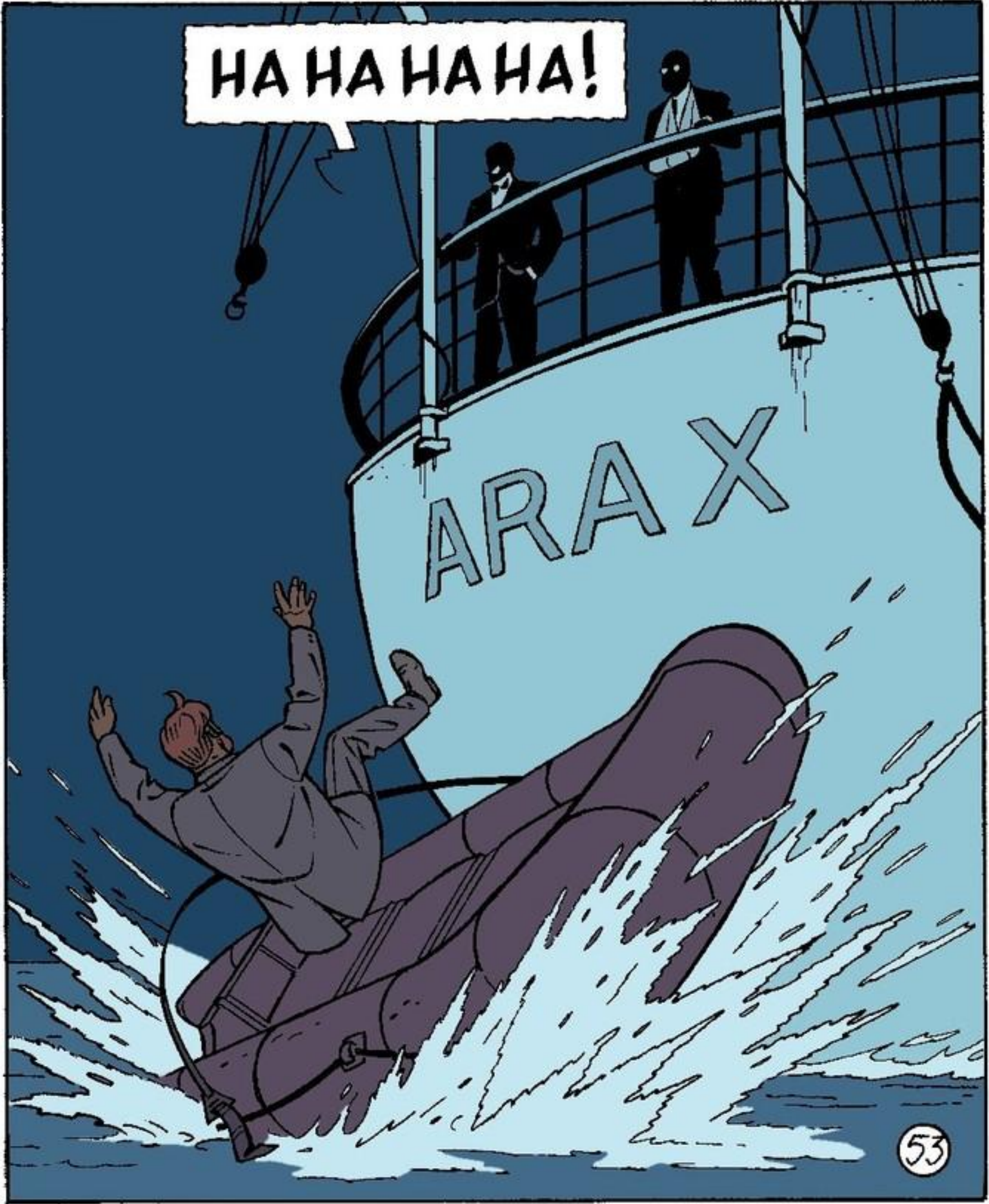


WITH THE "COLONEL" POINTING HIS GUN AT HIM, MORTIMER OBEYS.

I don't understand. What new game is this?

It's simple: I had to promise my employer I wouldn't do you any harm. But should you come to harm through your own fault, then I'd have nothing to do with it.

Let go, Jack. Our friend's eager to leave the ship.



HA HA HA HA!

You see, my dear fellow, I know you. I knew what you were going to attempt. So, I removed the oars from your dinghy, as well as the fresh water and emergency rations. Away from all major shipping lanes and with the gorgeous Greek sun looking down on you, you won't last long. Not to mention the sharks that I've been told roam these waters.



You're still the same despicable cur, Olrik!

We all have our role to play in the great movie of life, Mortimer. Right now, I must say I like mine better than yours, ha! Ha! Ha!

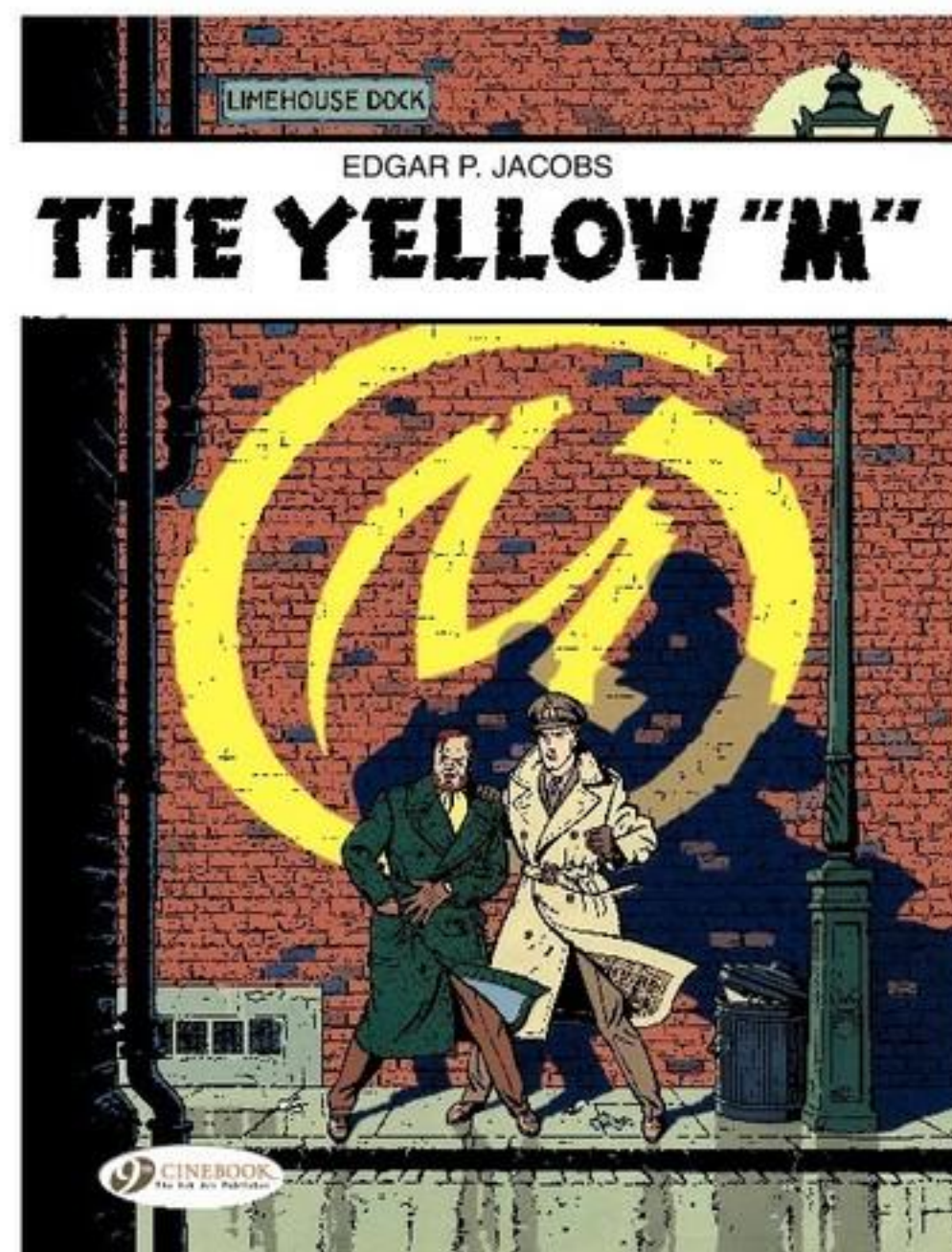


HAHAHAHA!

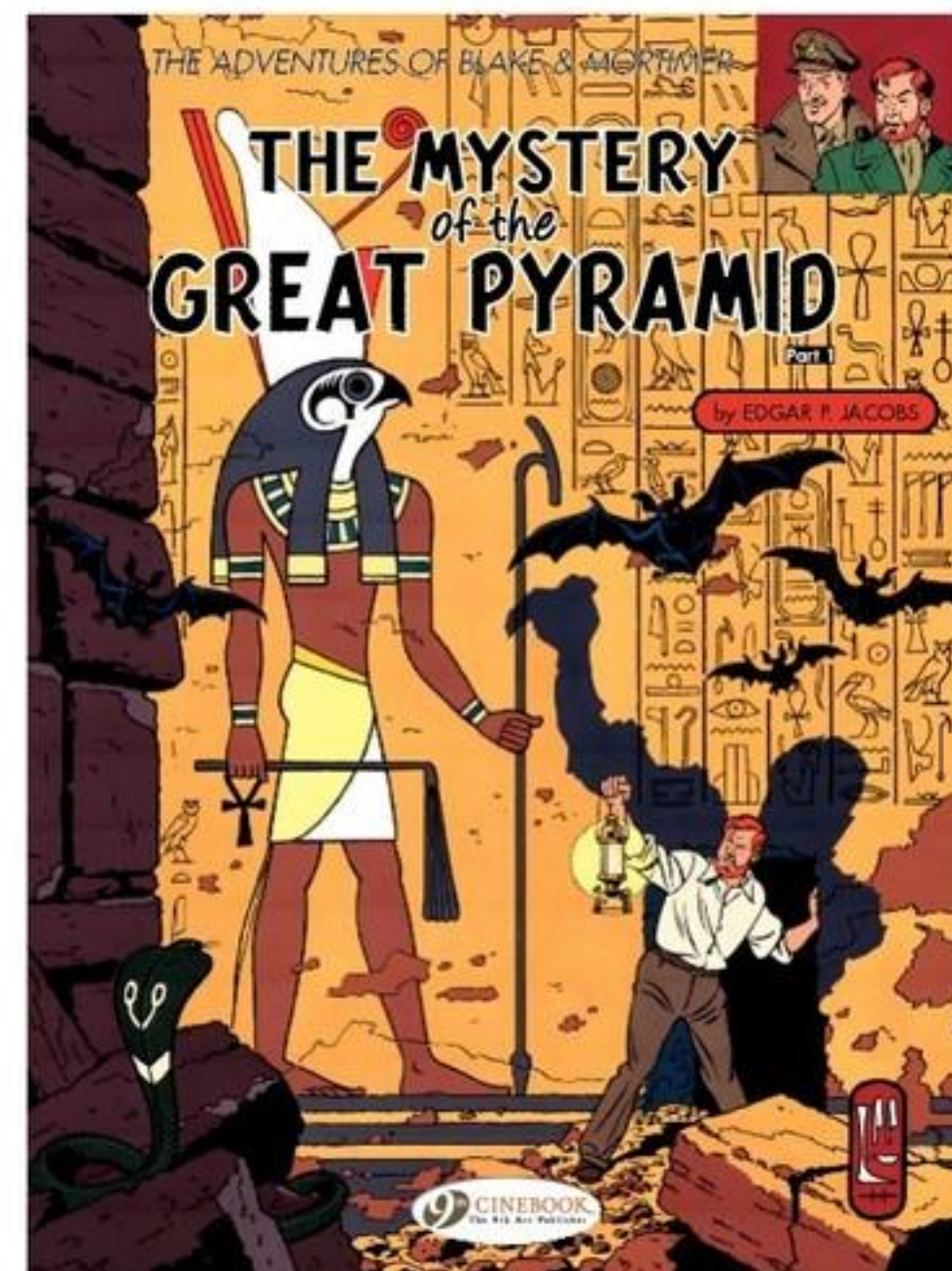




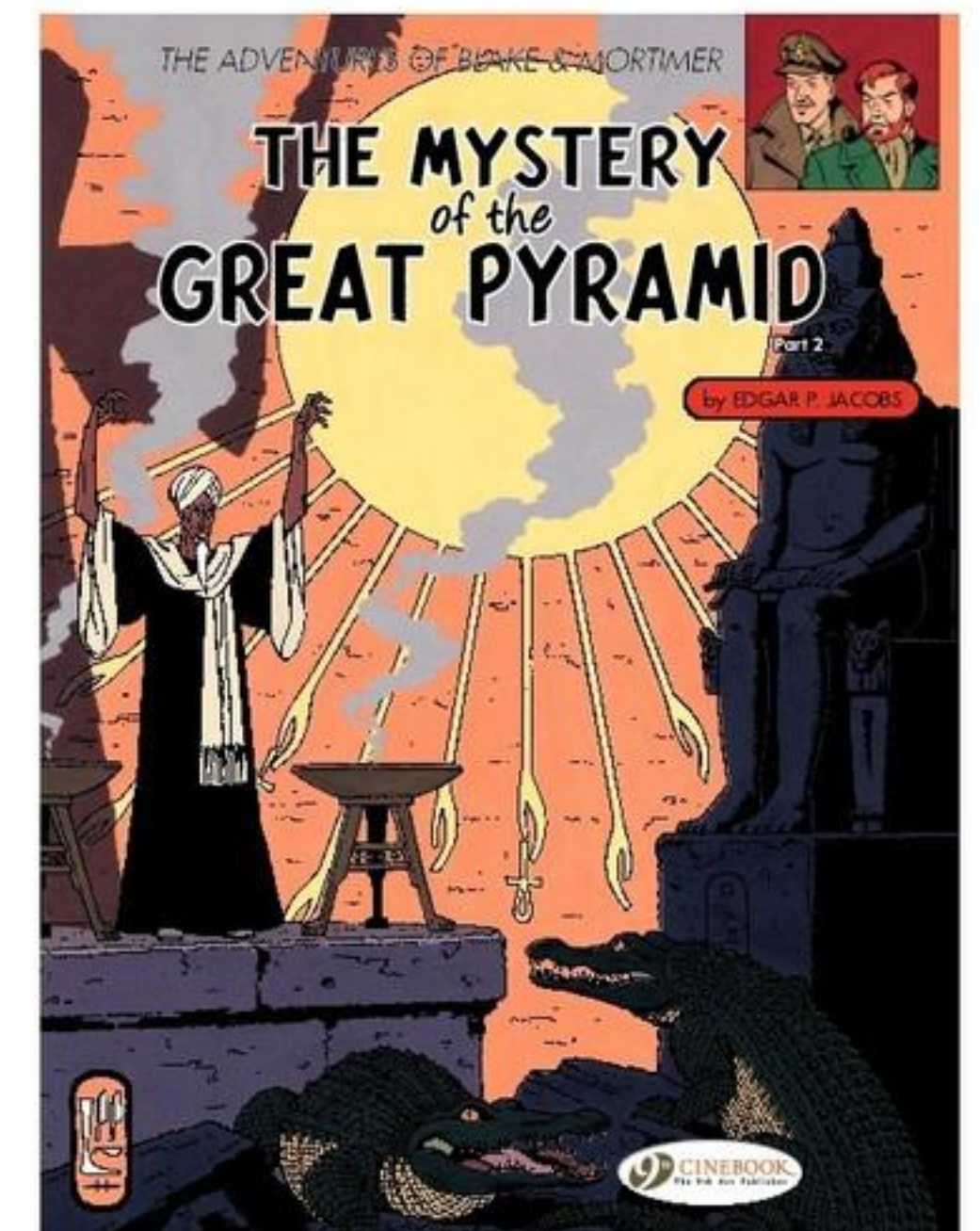
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



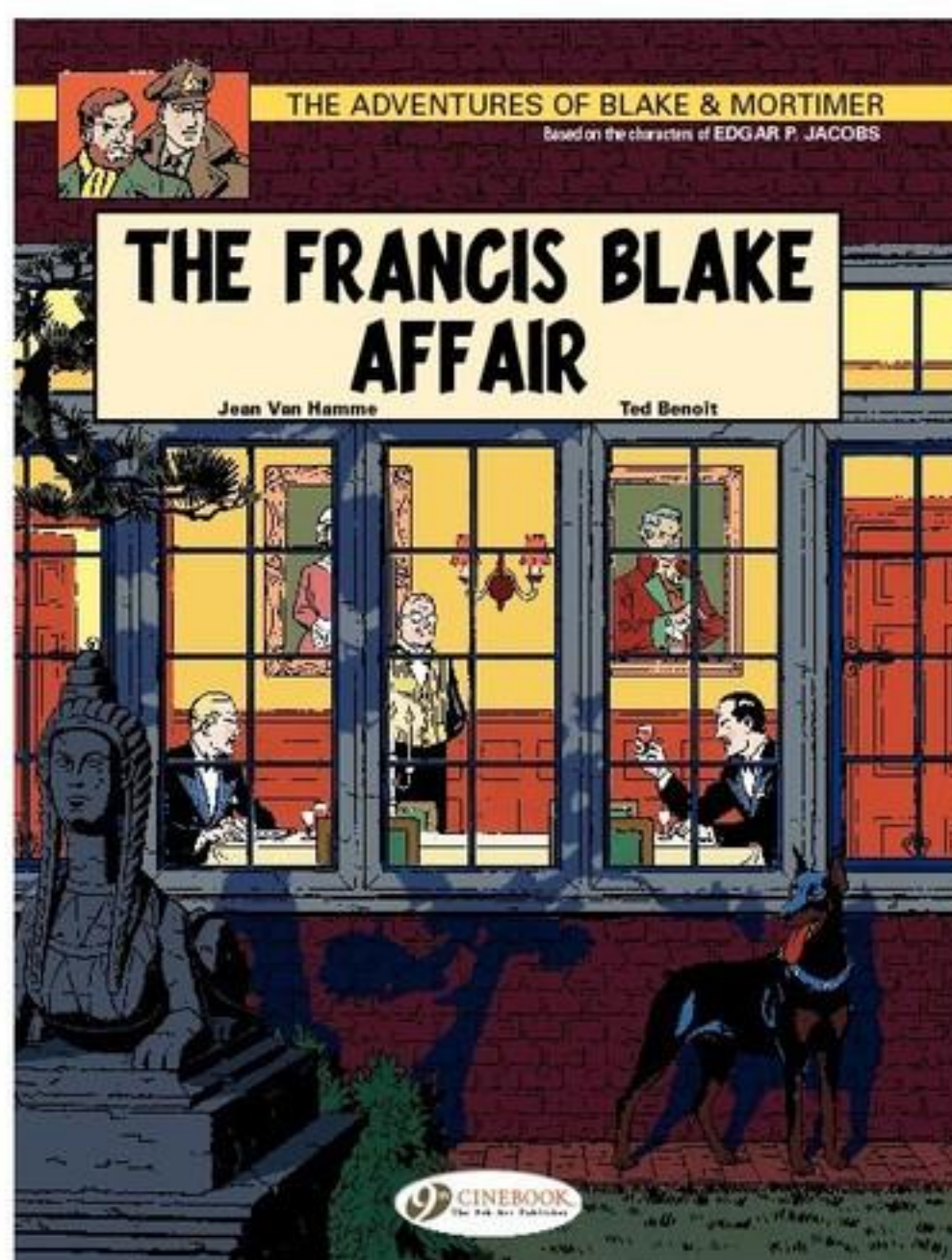
1 The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



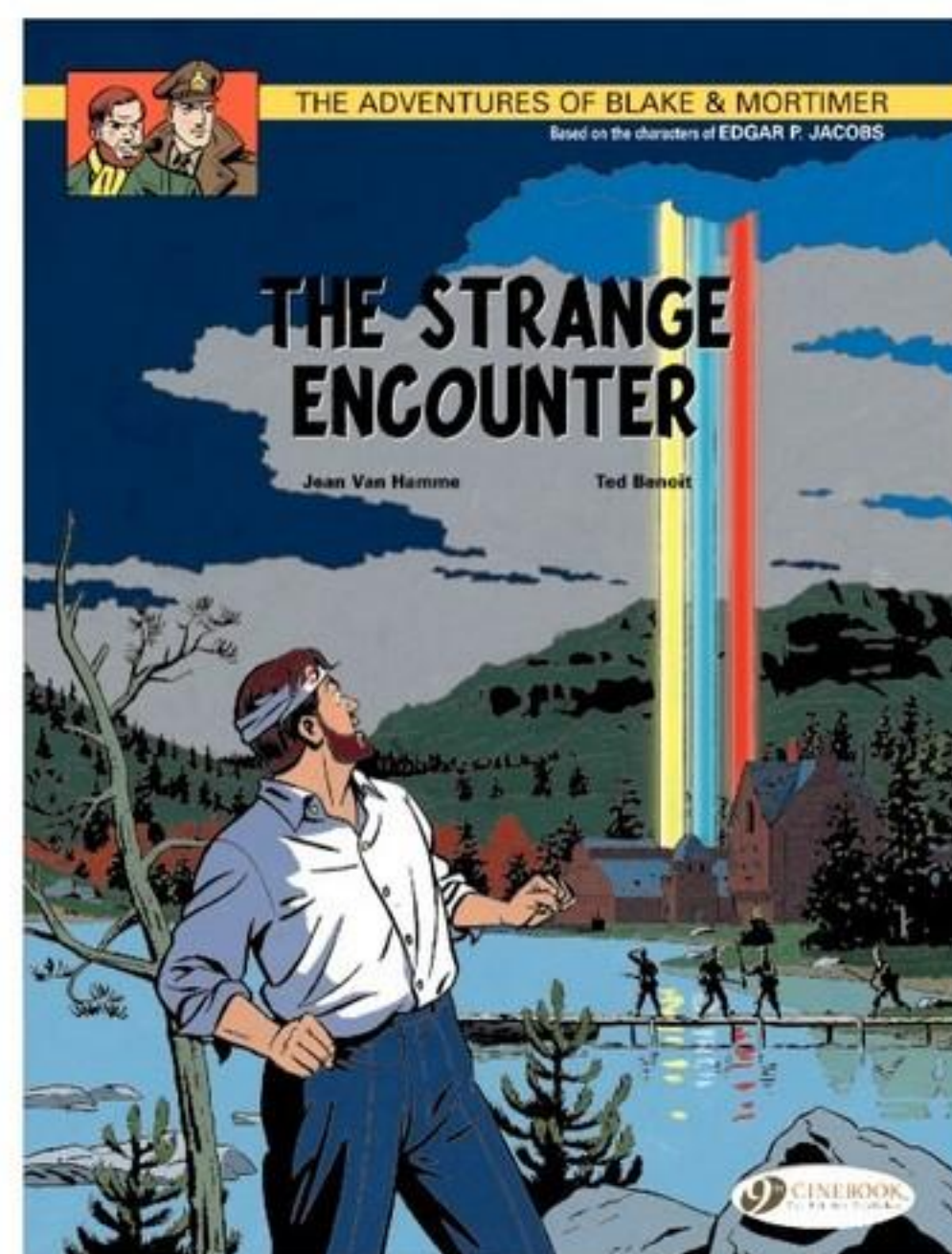
2 The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



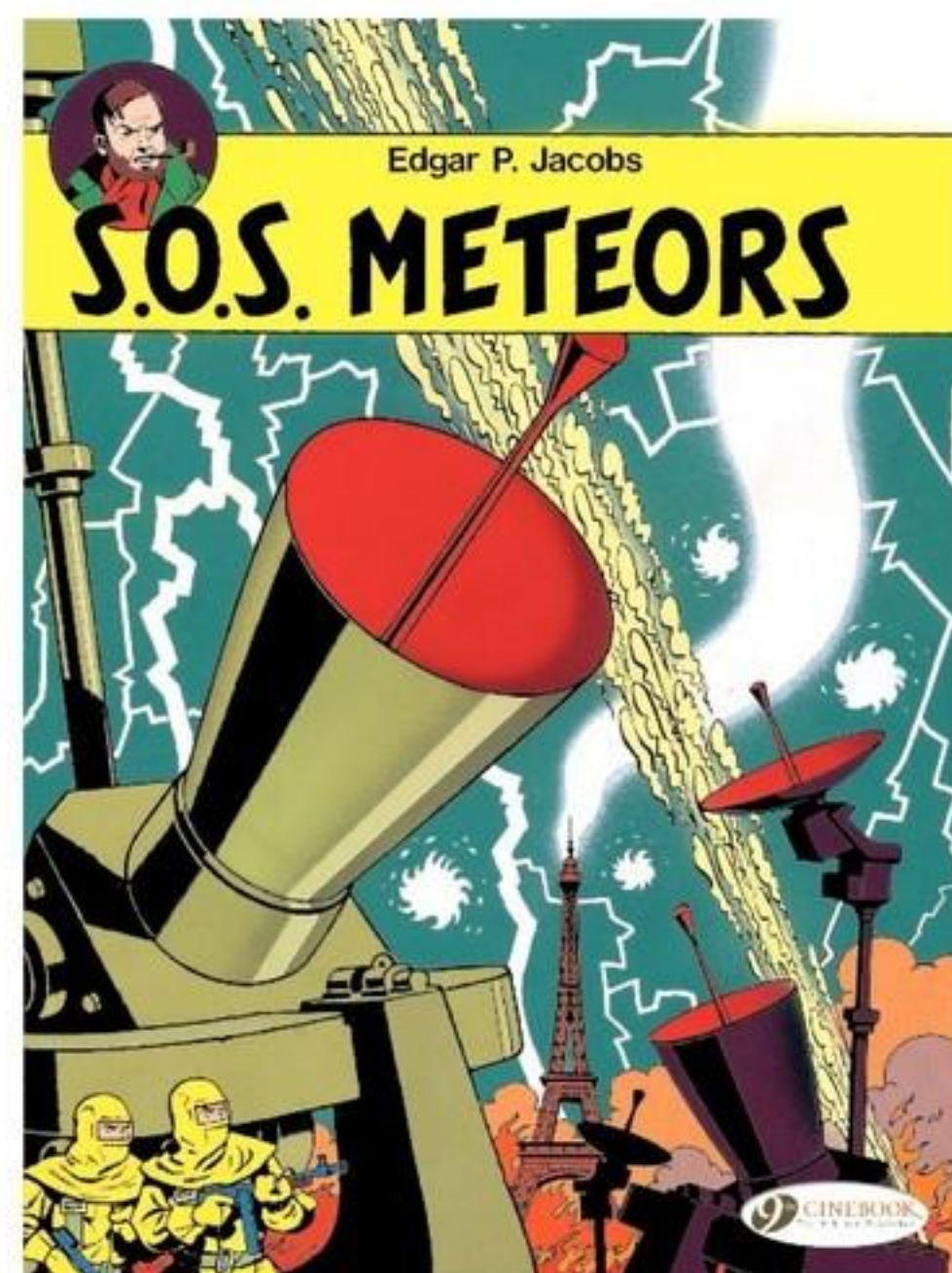
3 The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



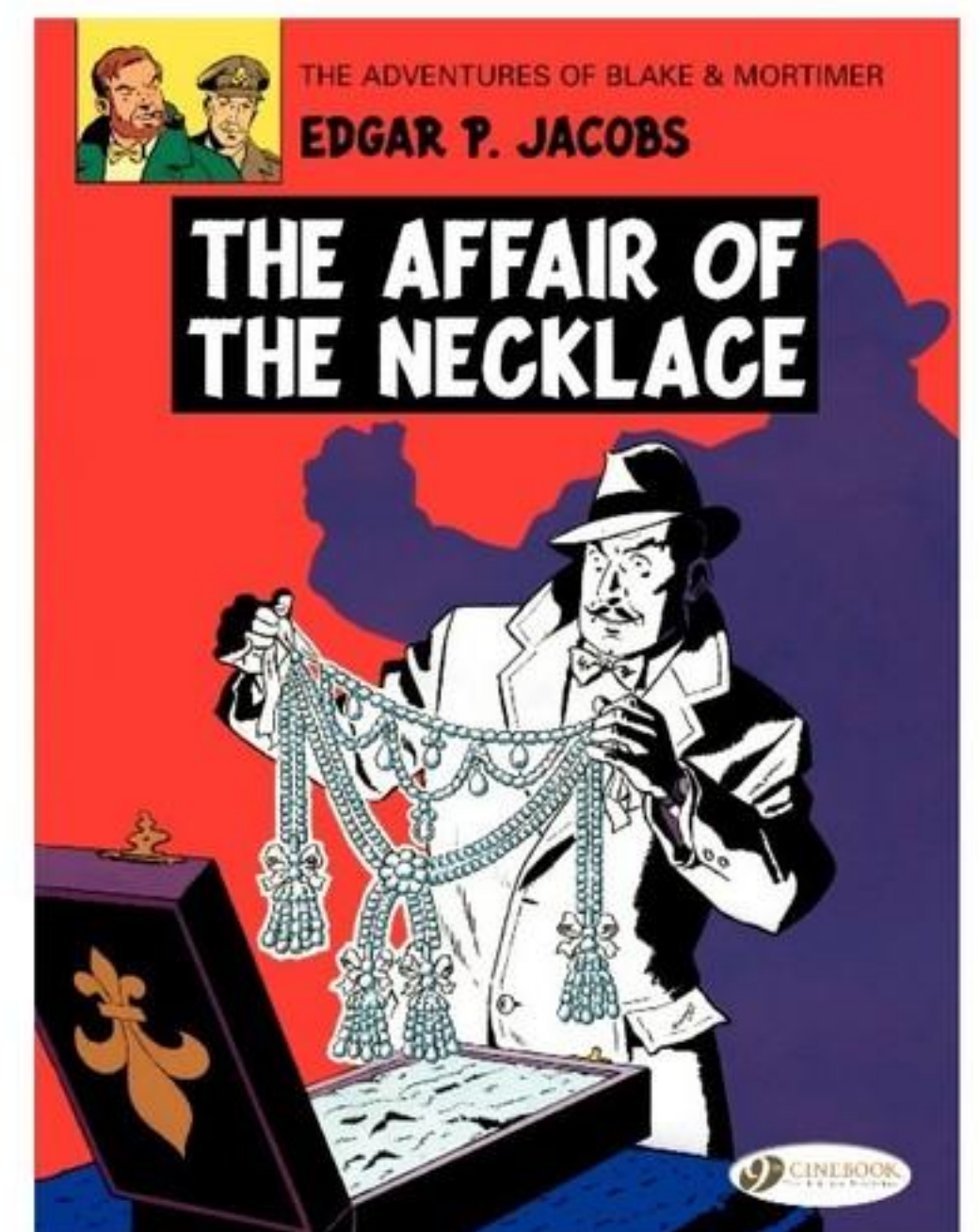
4 The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



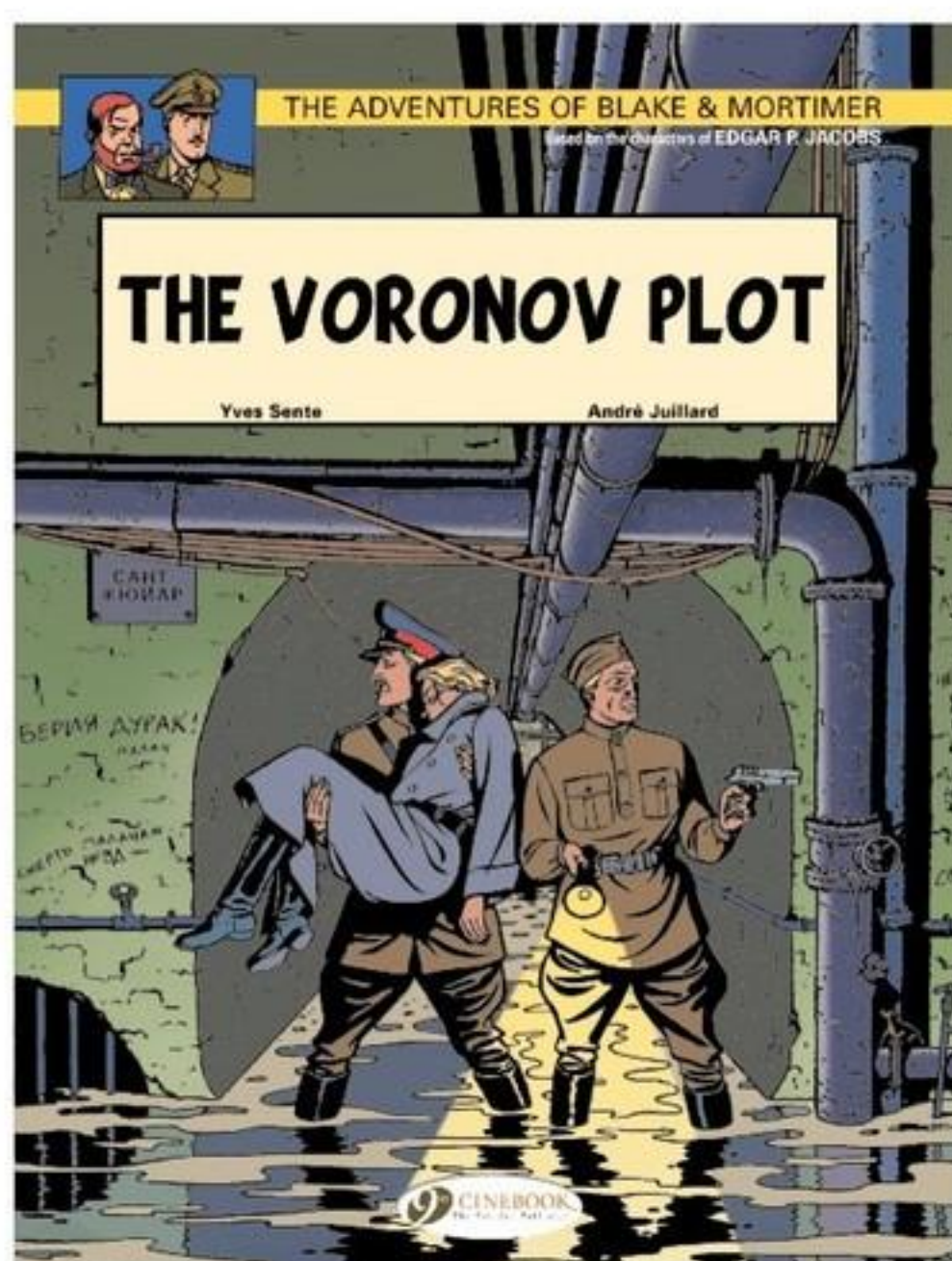
5 The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



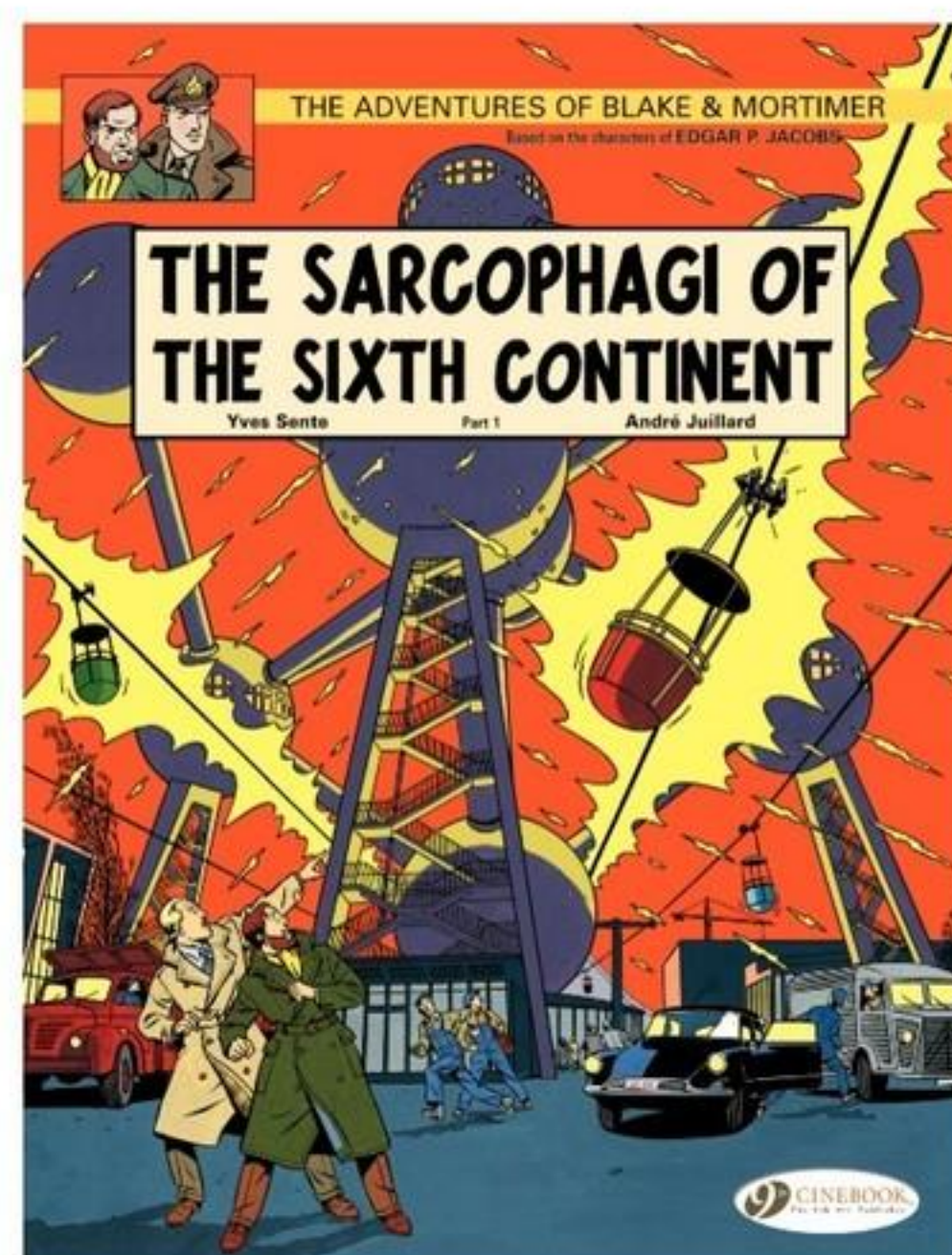
6 S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



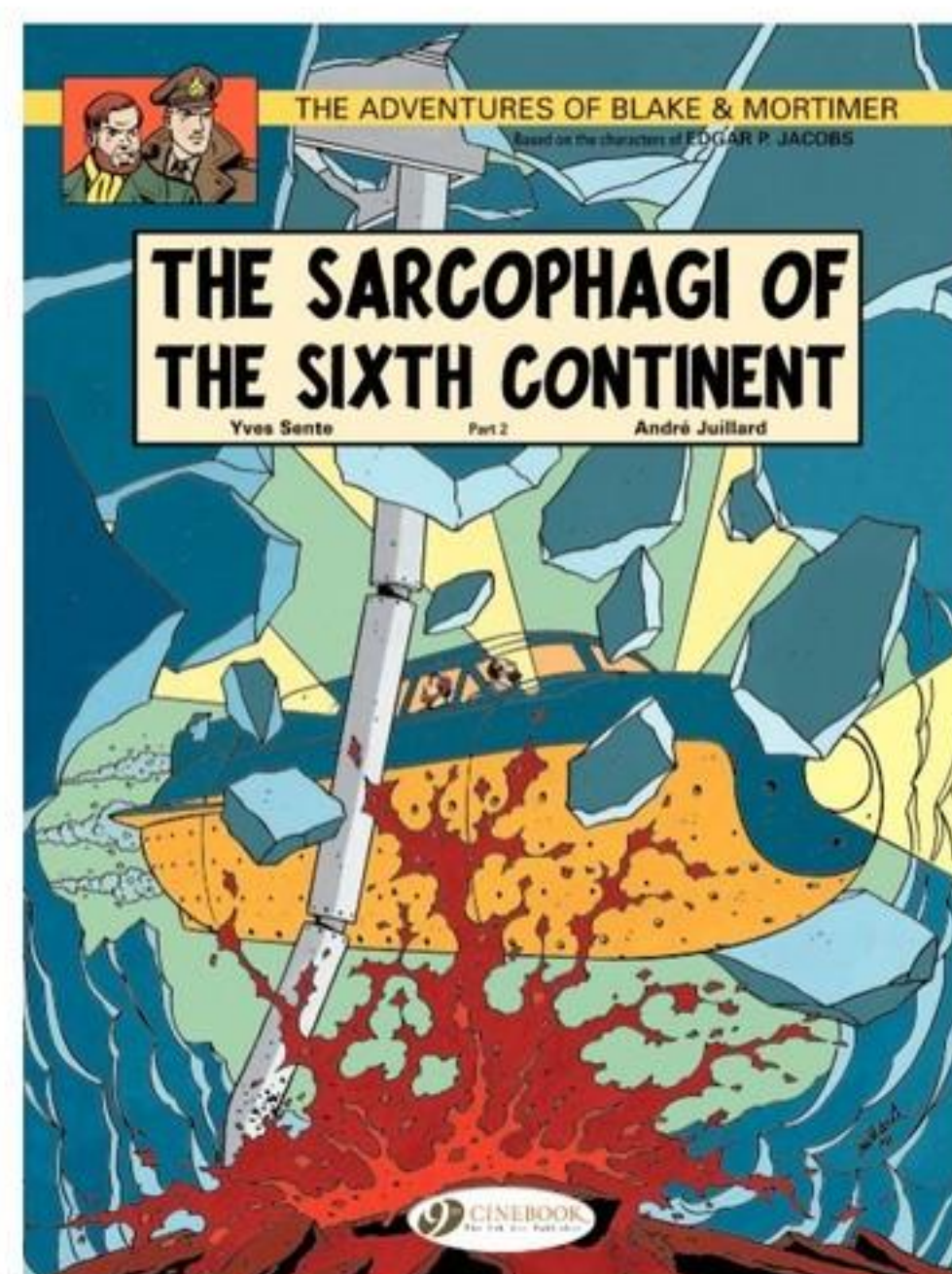
7 The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



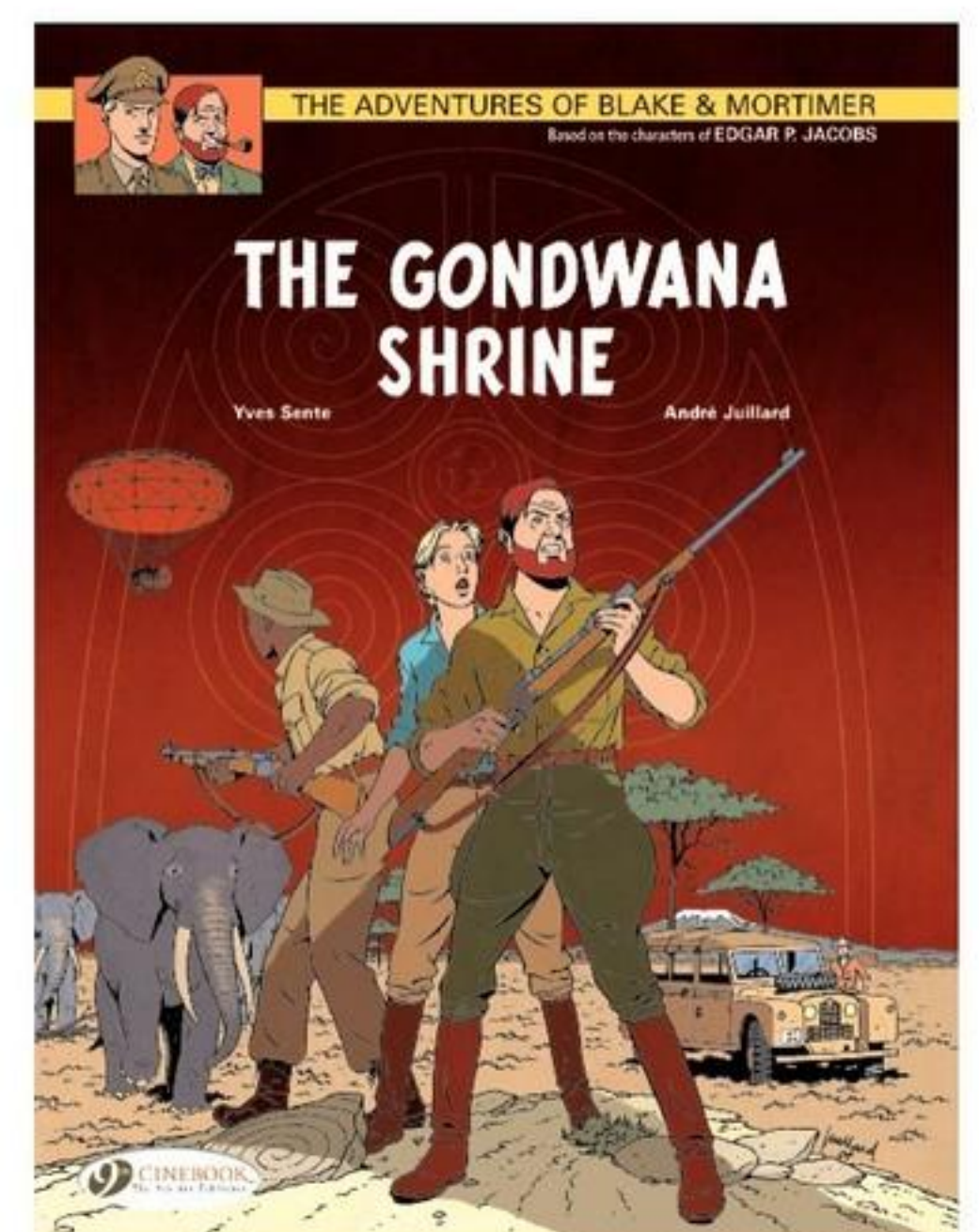
8 The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



9 The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD

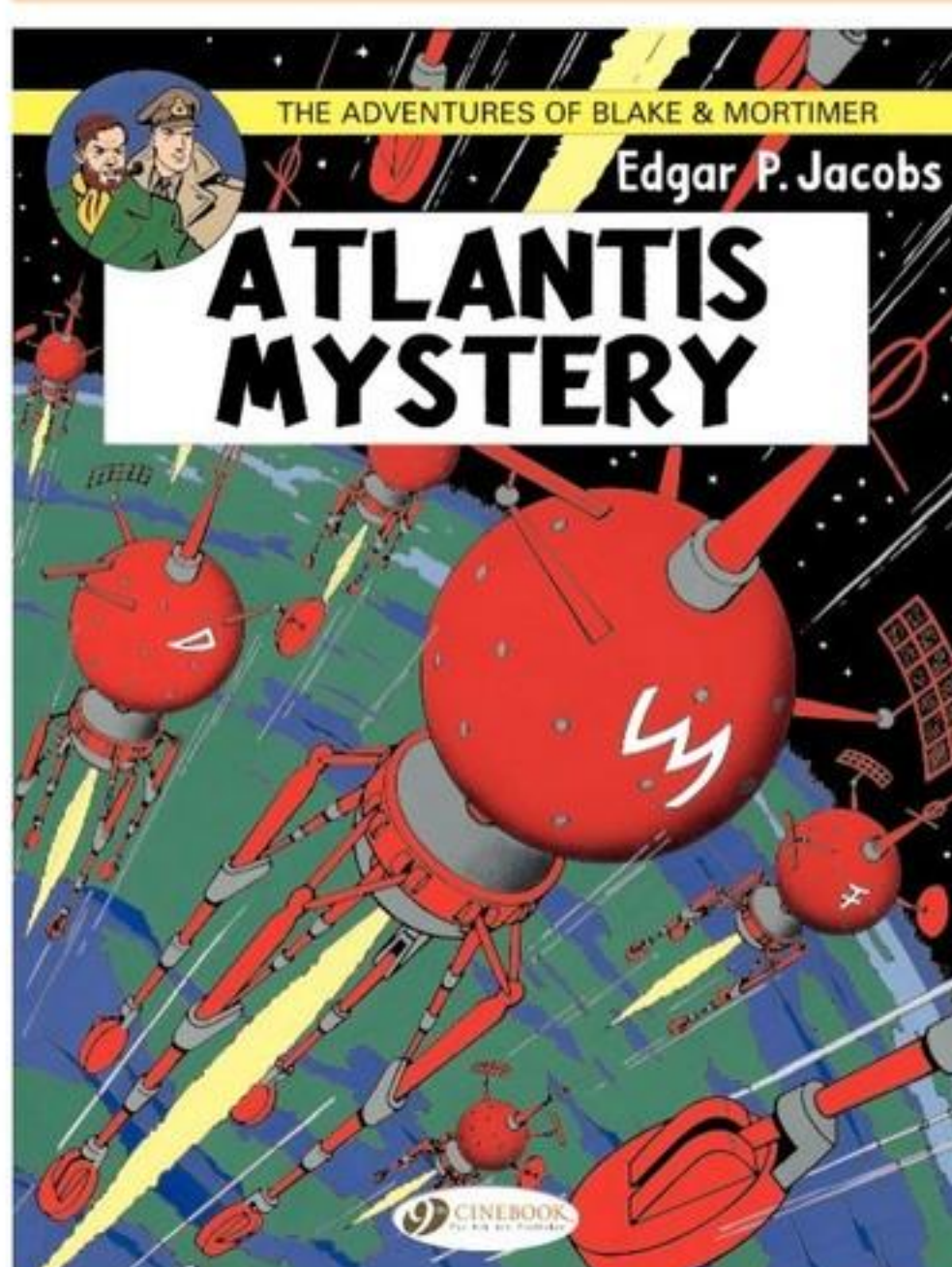


10 The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD

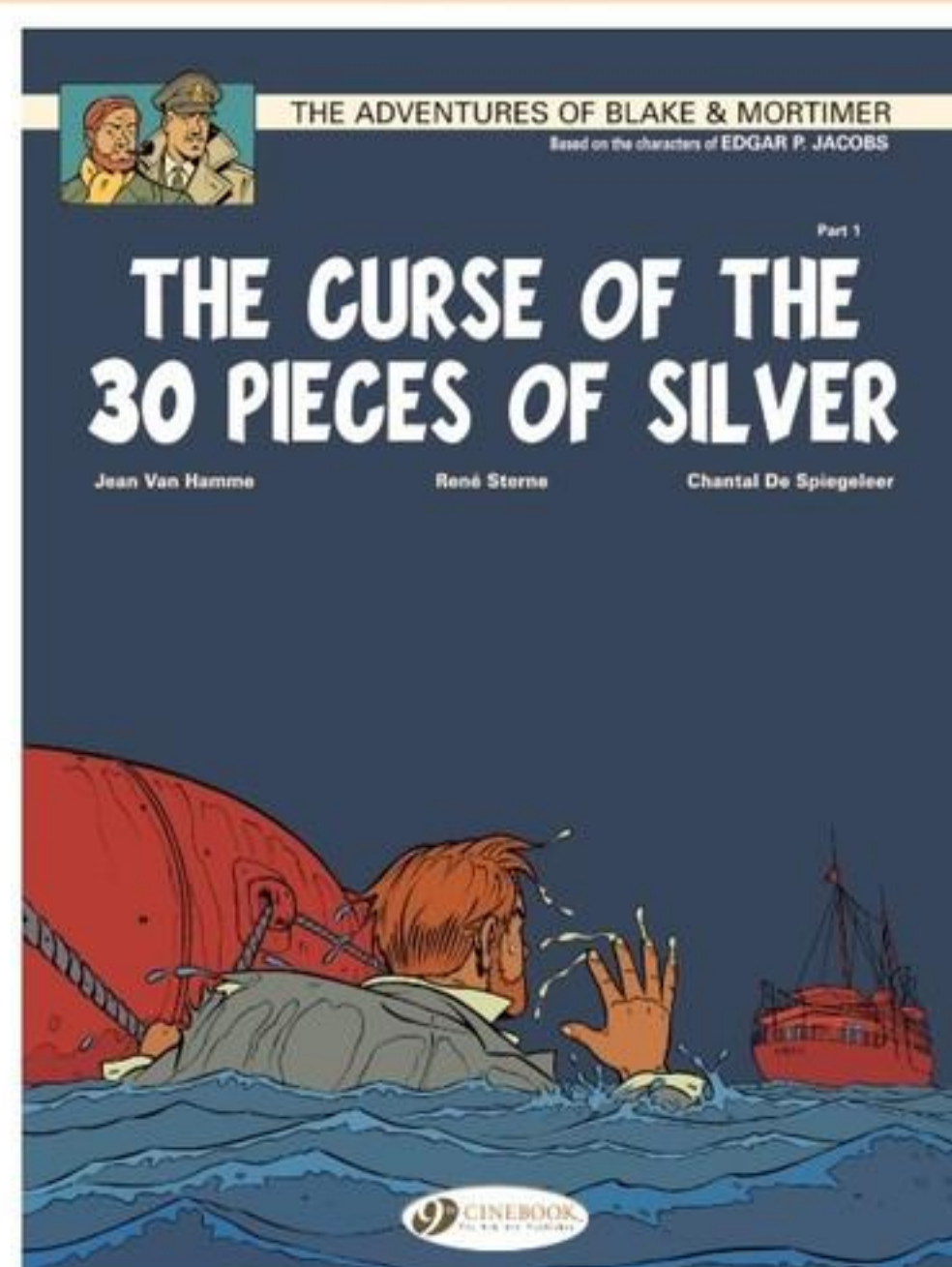


11 The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD

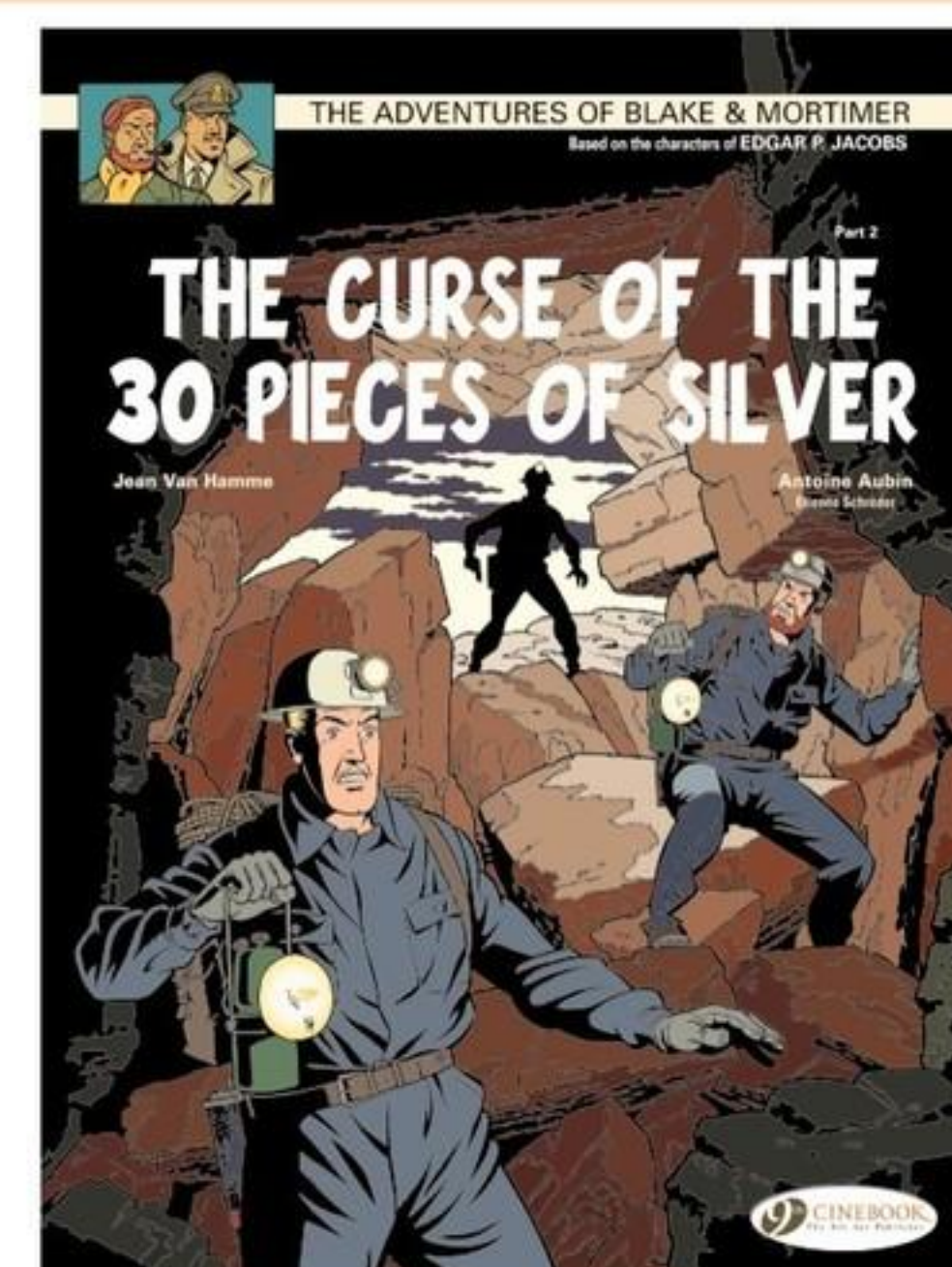
2012



12 Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS



13 The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER



14 The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHRÉDER

FOR BLAKE AND MORTIMER, THE SEARCH FOR JUDAS'S GRAVE LEADS STRAIGHT TO... HELL!



© Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud-Lombard s.a.) - Jean Van Hamme & Antoine Aubin



JEAN VAN HAMME

THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

AUGUST 2012

Part 2

PUBLISHED BY



ANTOINE AUBIN



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

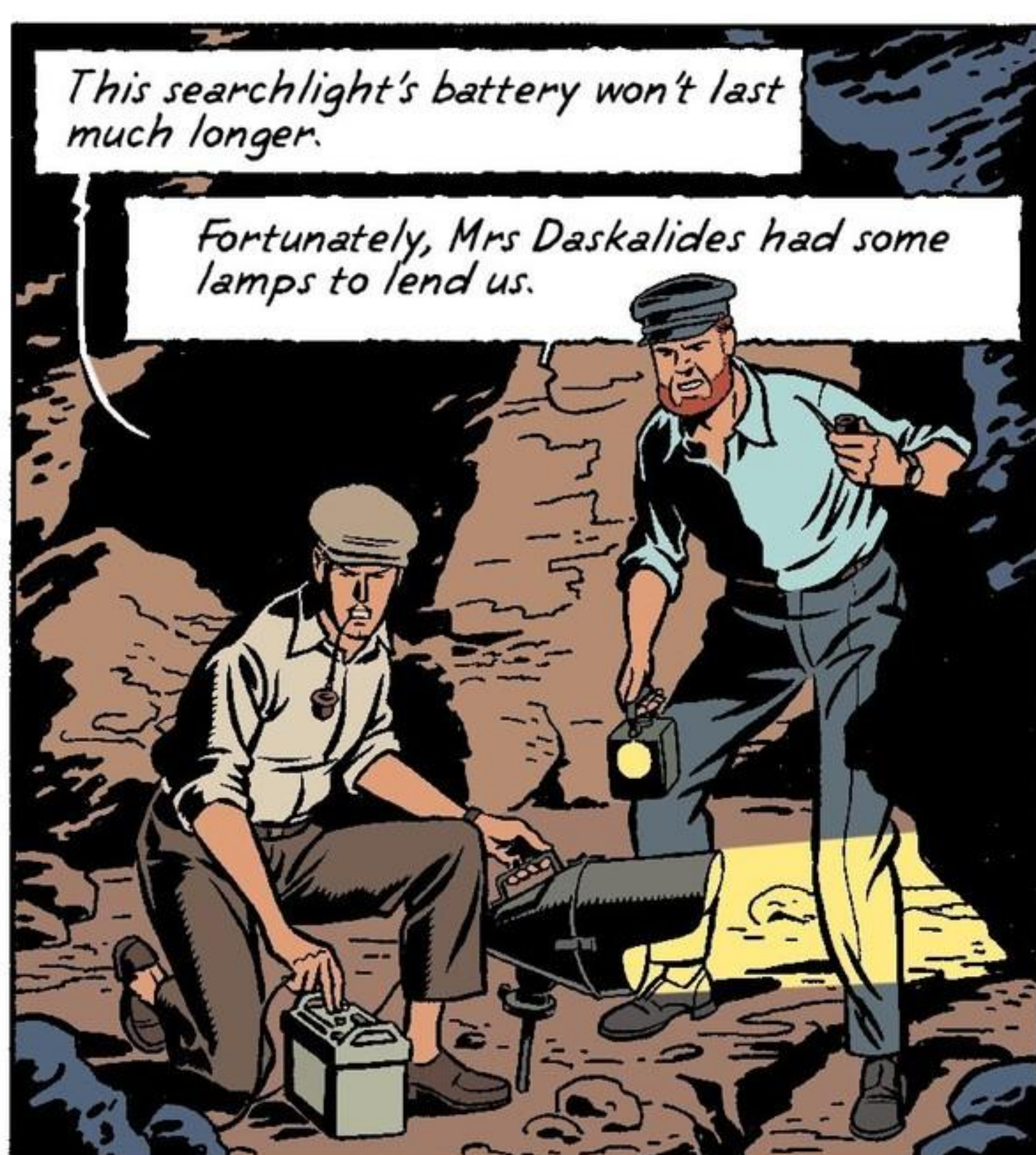
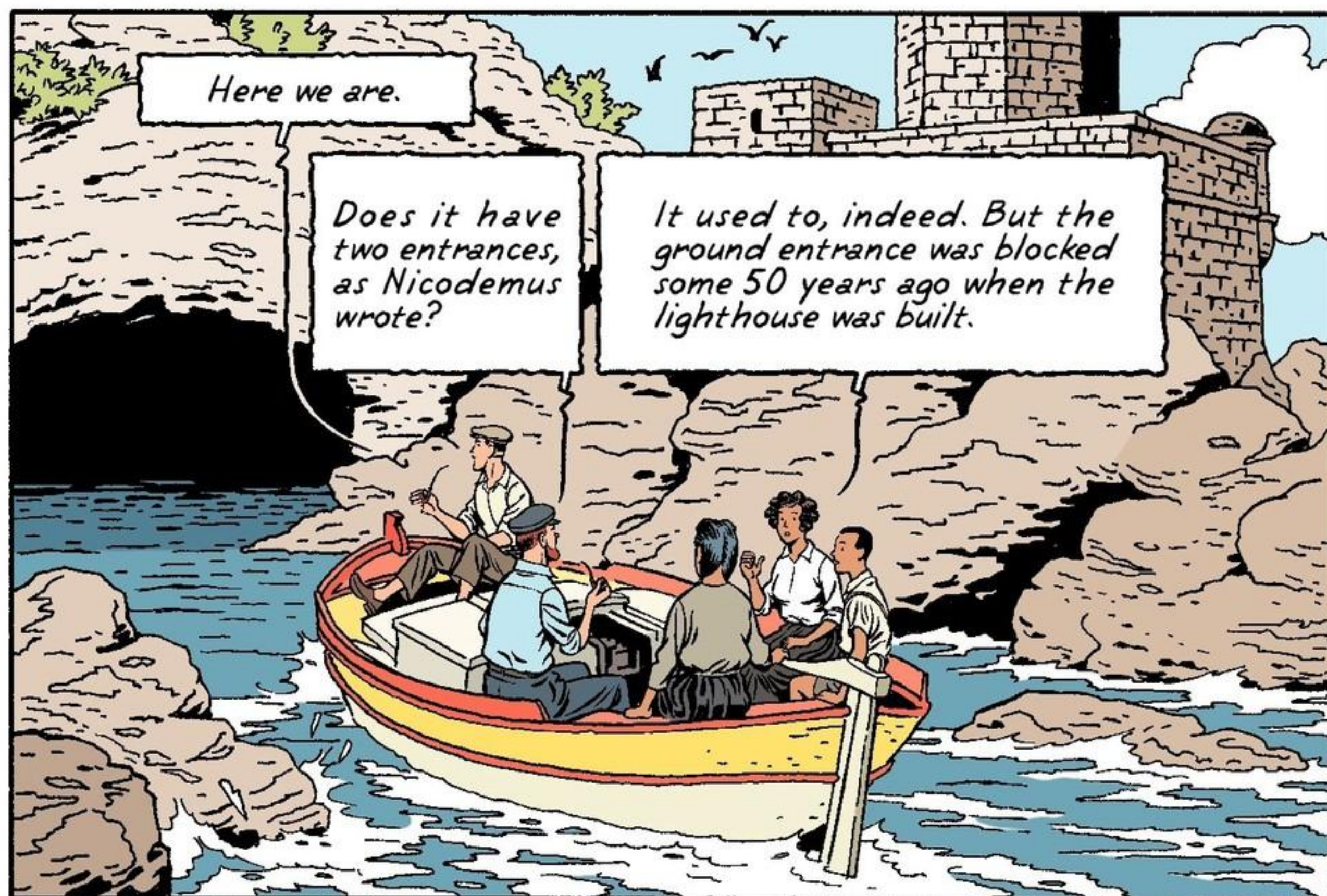
Part 2

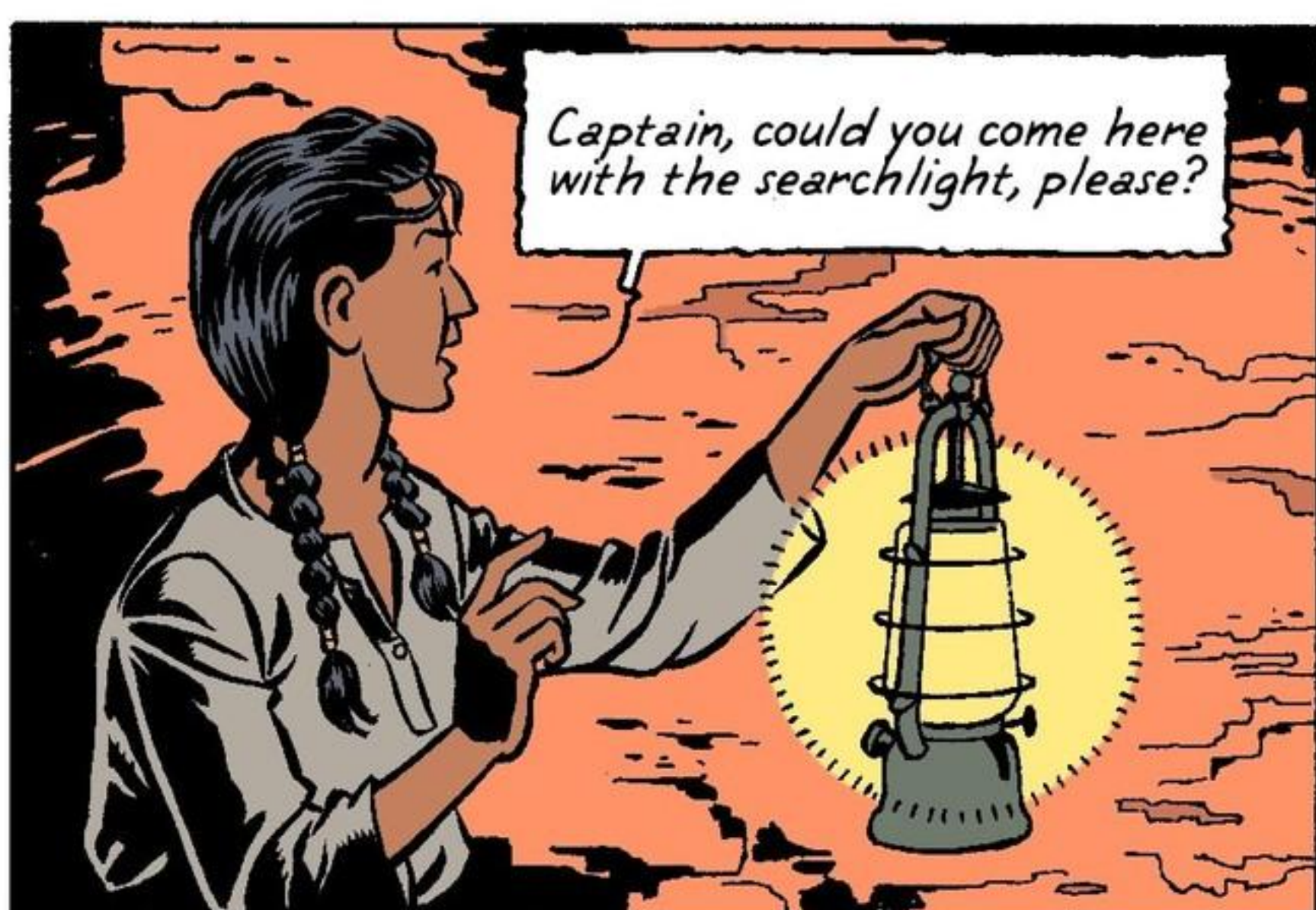
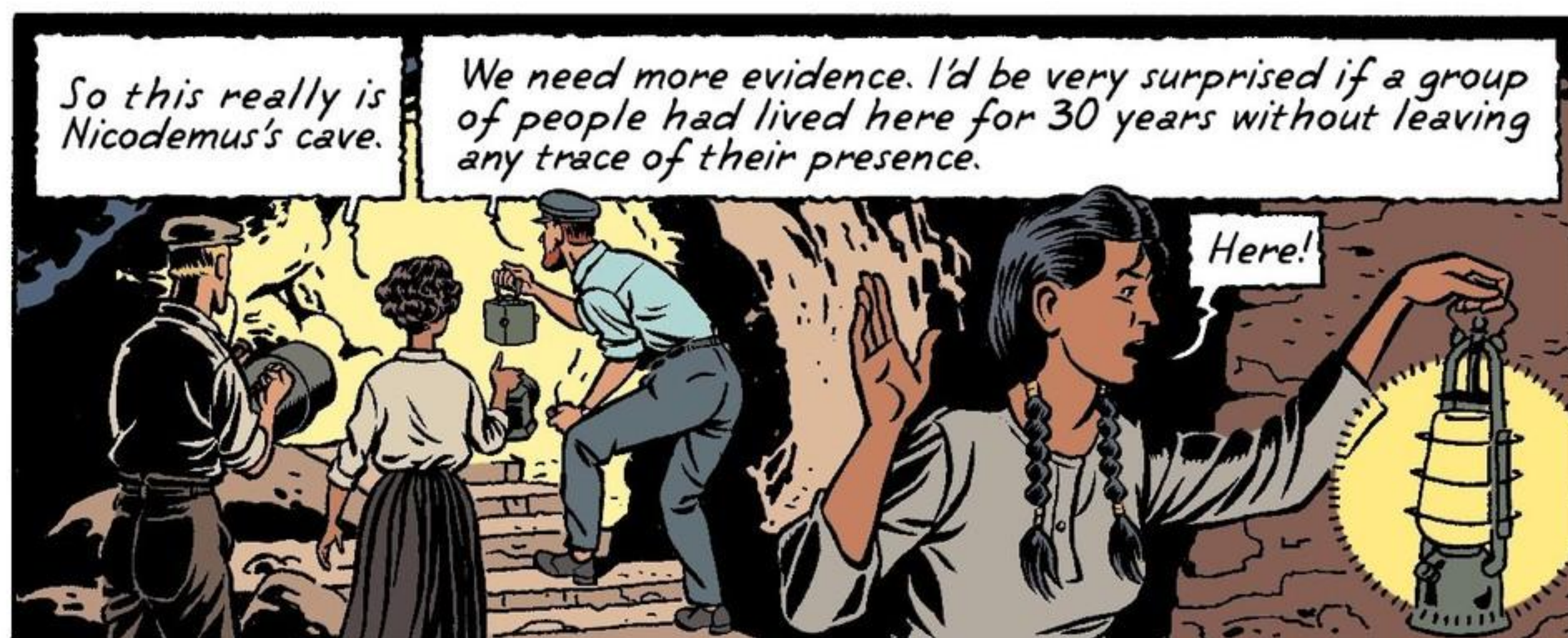
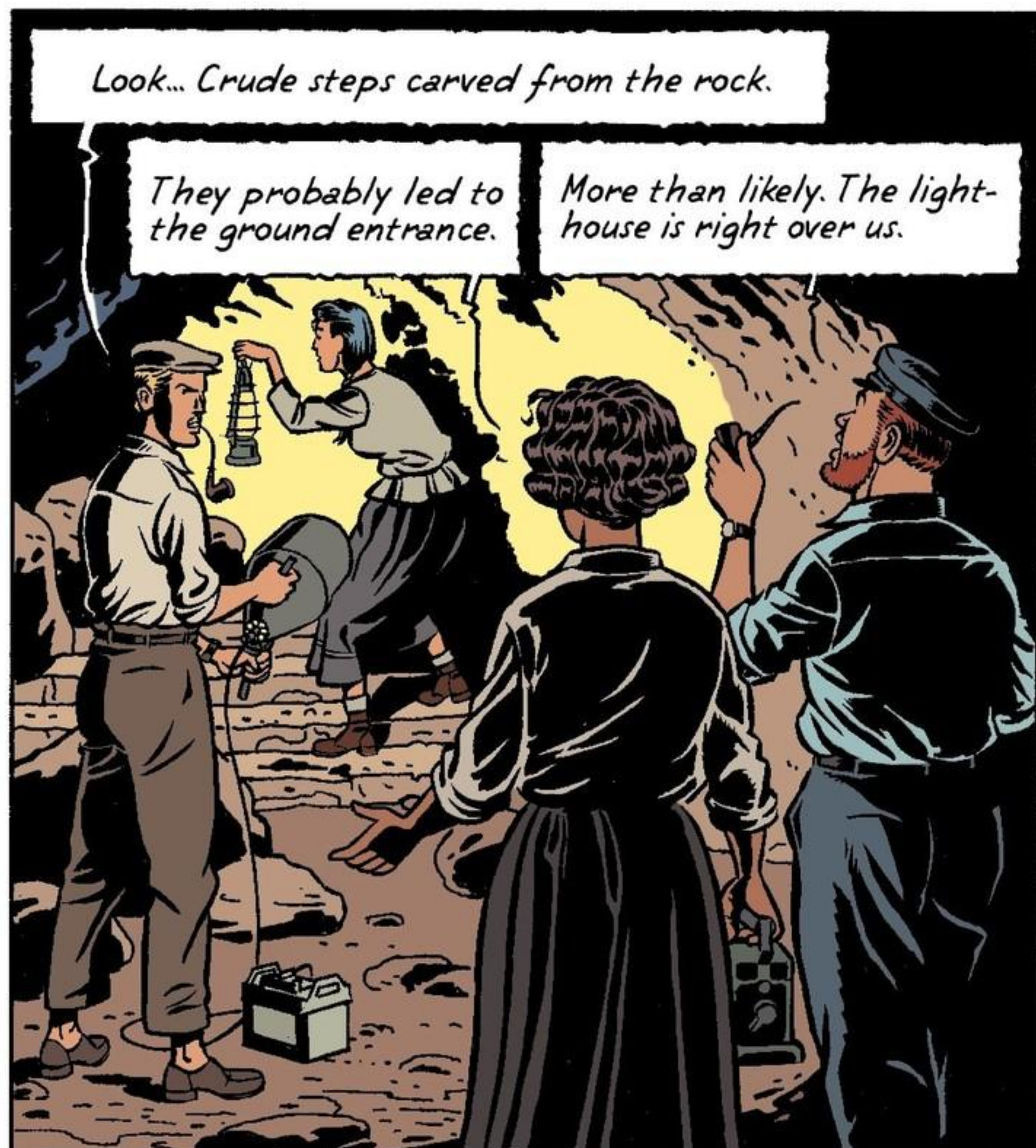
THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

Jean Van Hamme

Antoine Aubin
Etienne Schréder





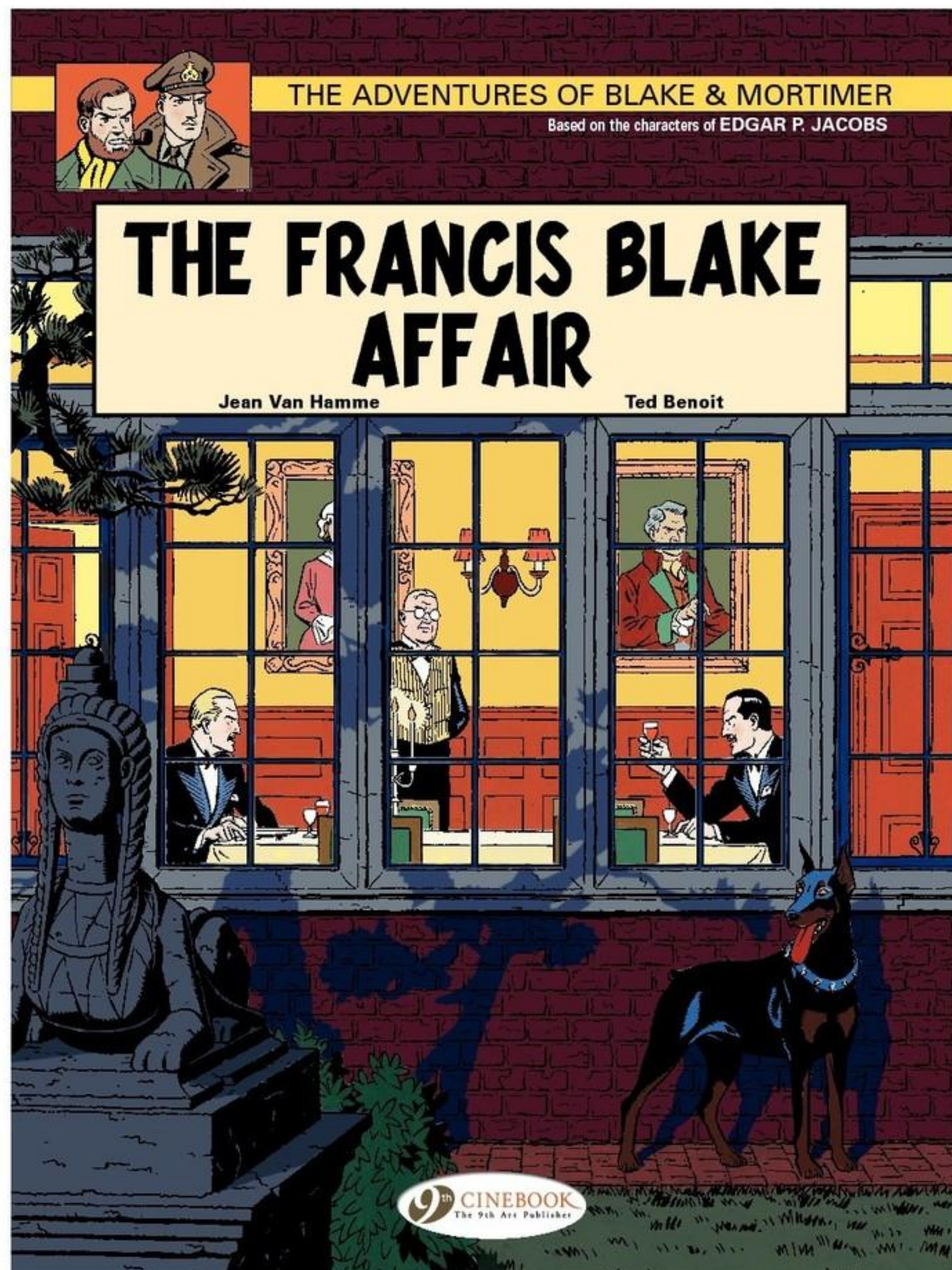


THE FRANCIS BLAKE AFFAIR

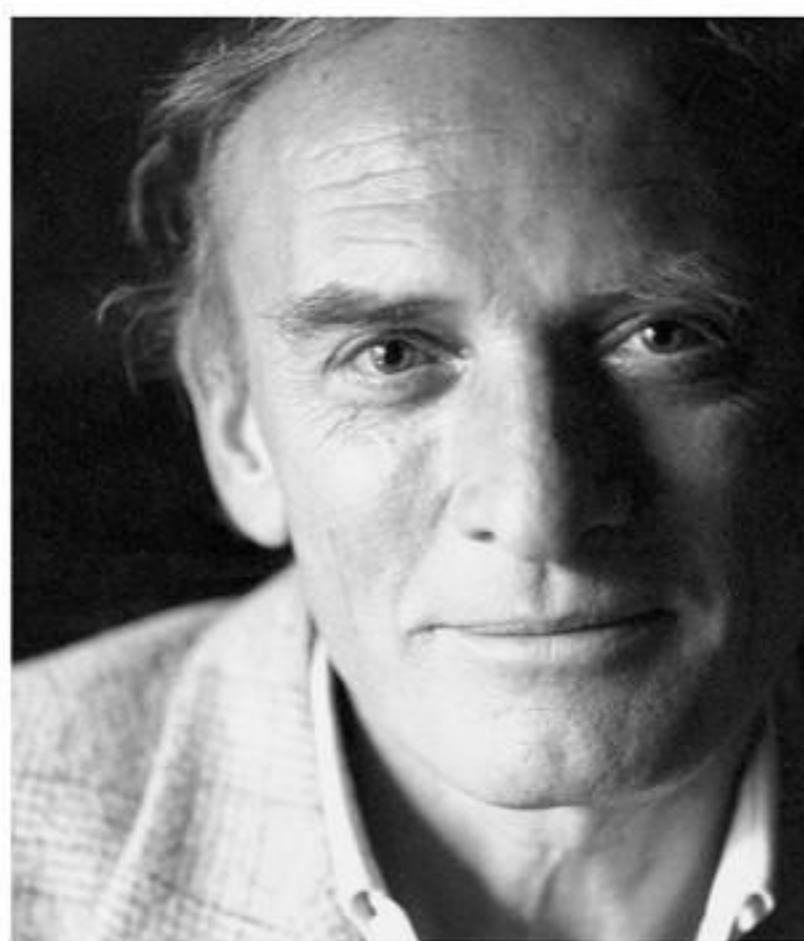
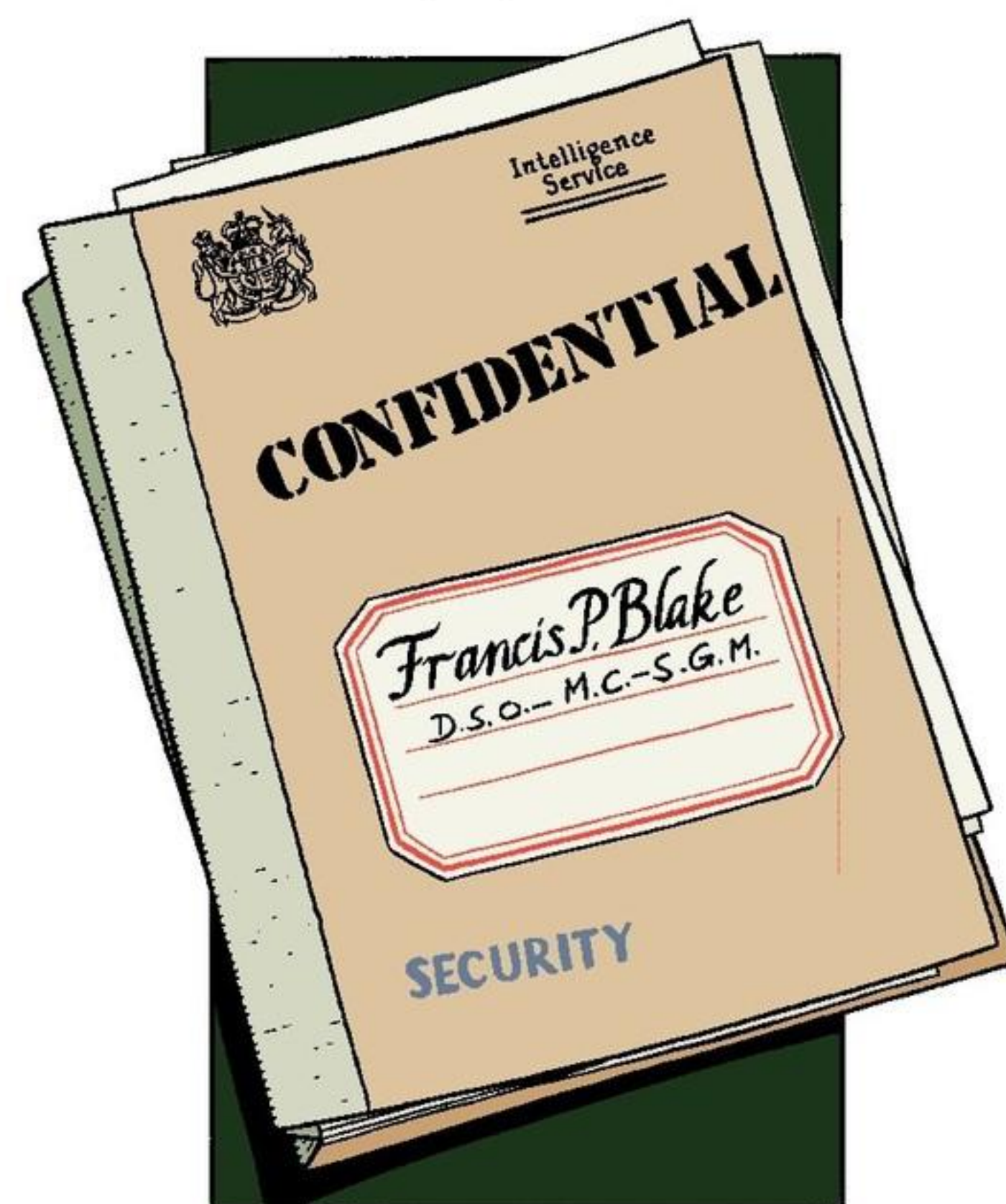
Jean Van Hamme

Ted Benoit

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

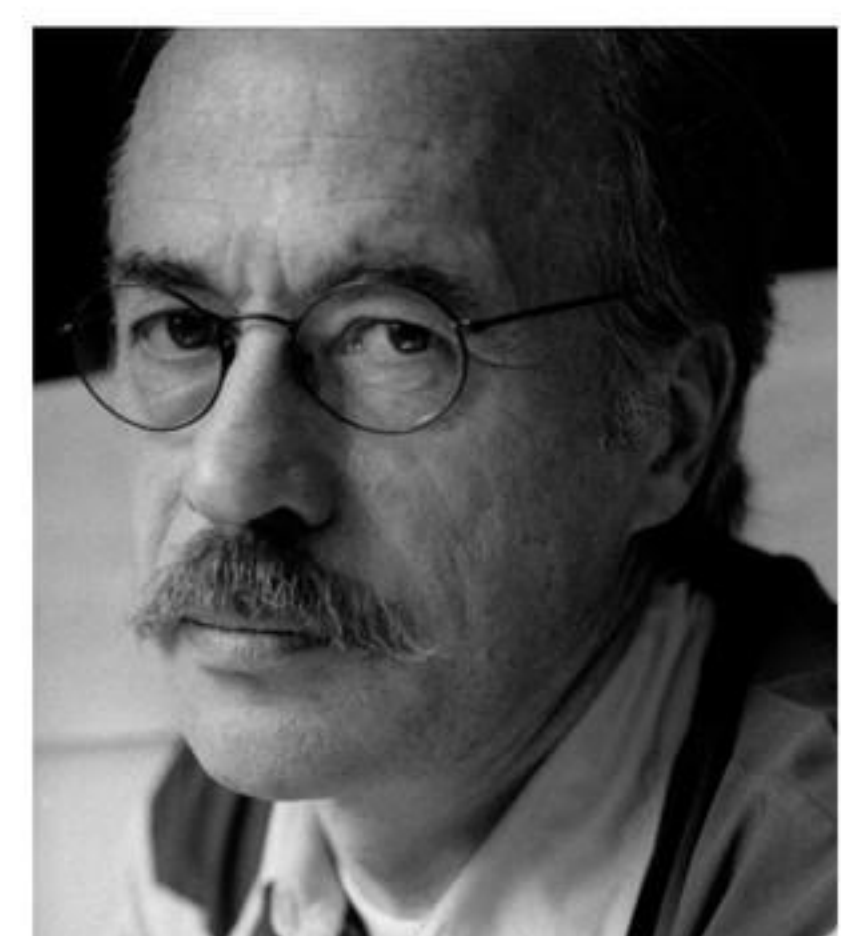


Scandal breaks in the London press: There is a mole in the Intelligence Service! And it appears without a doubt, in a photograph taken by agents of MI5, that the mole wears the face of Francis Blake! Mortimer is determined to believe that his friend has been forced to act against his will. But the initial investigations sweep away this hypothesis: Blake has opened, under an assumed name, an account fed by payments coming from the Bahamas. In a few months, he has withdrawn £30,000—more than 10 times his annual pay!



Jean **Van Hamme** is one of Belgium's most successful contemporary novelists and comics writers. His most popular successes are "Thorgal" (illustrated by **Rosinski**), "Largo Winch" (illustrated by **Francq**), "Lady S." (illustrated by **Aymond**) and "XIII" (illustrated by **Vance**). These series are translated and published in English by Cinebook. In 2005, he was appointed "Officier des Arts et des Lettres" by the French Minister of Culture.

The artist Ted **Benoit** is a big admirer and supporter of the "clear line" graphic style instituted by **Hergé** and E. P. **Jacobs**. His work is described simply as a combination of extravagance, meticulousness and intelligence. For over 30 years, Ted **Benoit** has been creating work of surprisingly powerful simplicity, from the "Vers la Ligne Claire" collection in 1979 to the "Un Nouveau Monde" collection published in 2006.





AT THE TIME THIS NEW STORY BEGINS, AND WHILE LONDONERS ARE ENJOYING THE WARMTH OF AN EXCEPTIONALLY SUNNY MONTH OF JUNE, ALARMING NEWS REACHES THE EMPLOYEES OF THE CITY AS THEY HURRY TO THEIR OFFICES.

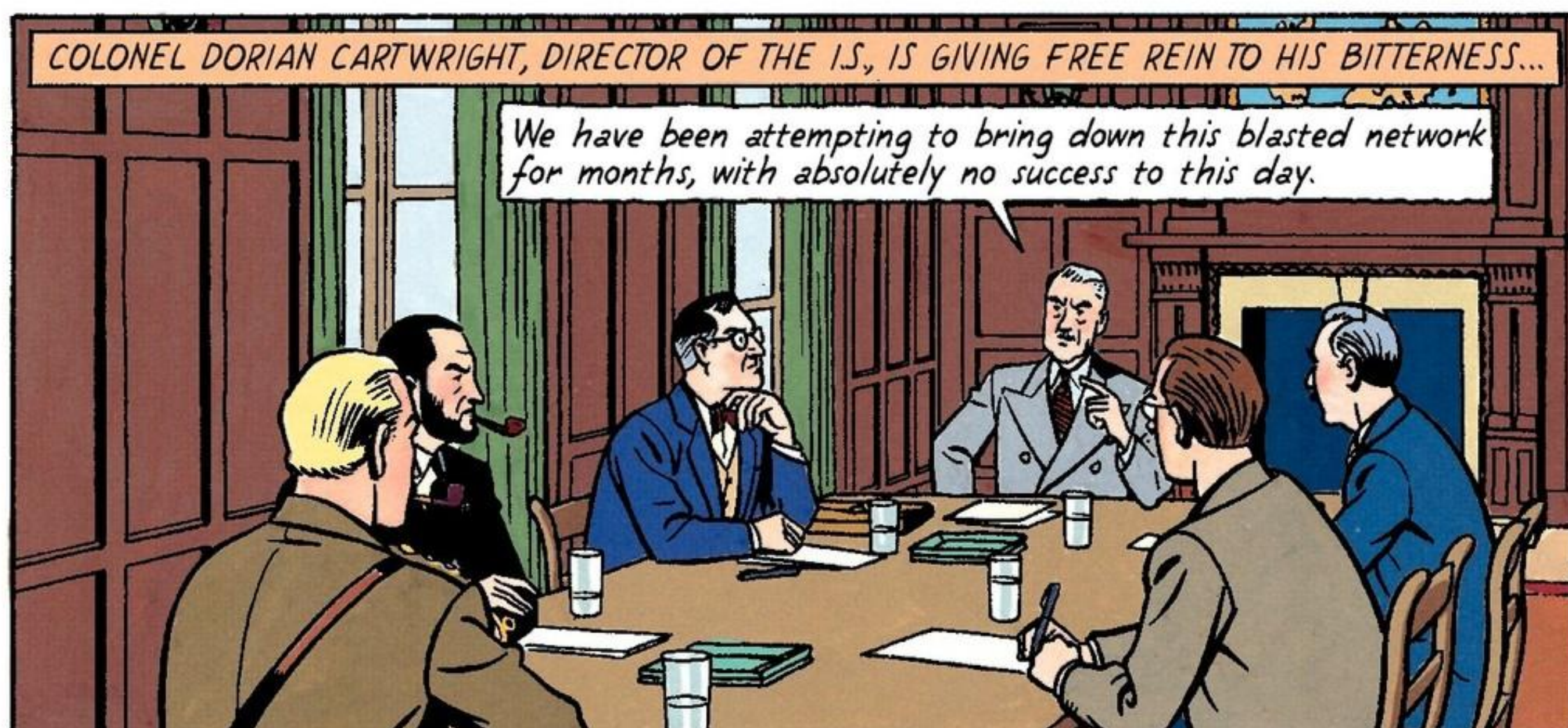
Breaking news! After his arrest, a spy reveals the existence of a network of foreign agents on British soil!

Get your Daily Mail! Is there a "mole" within the Intelligence Service?



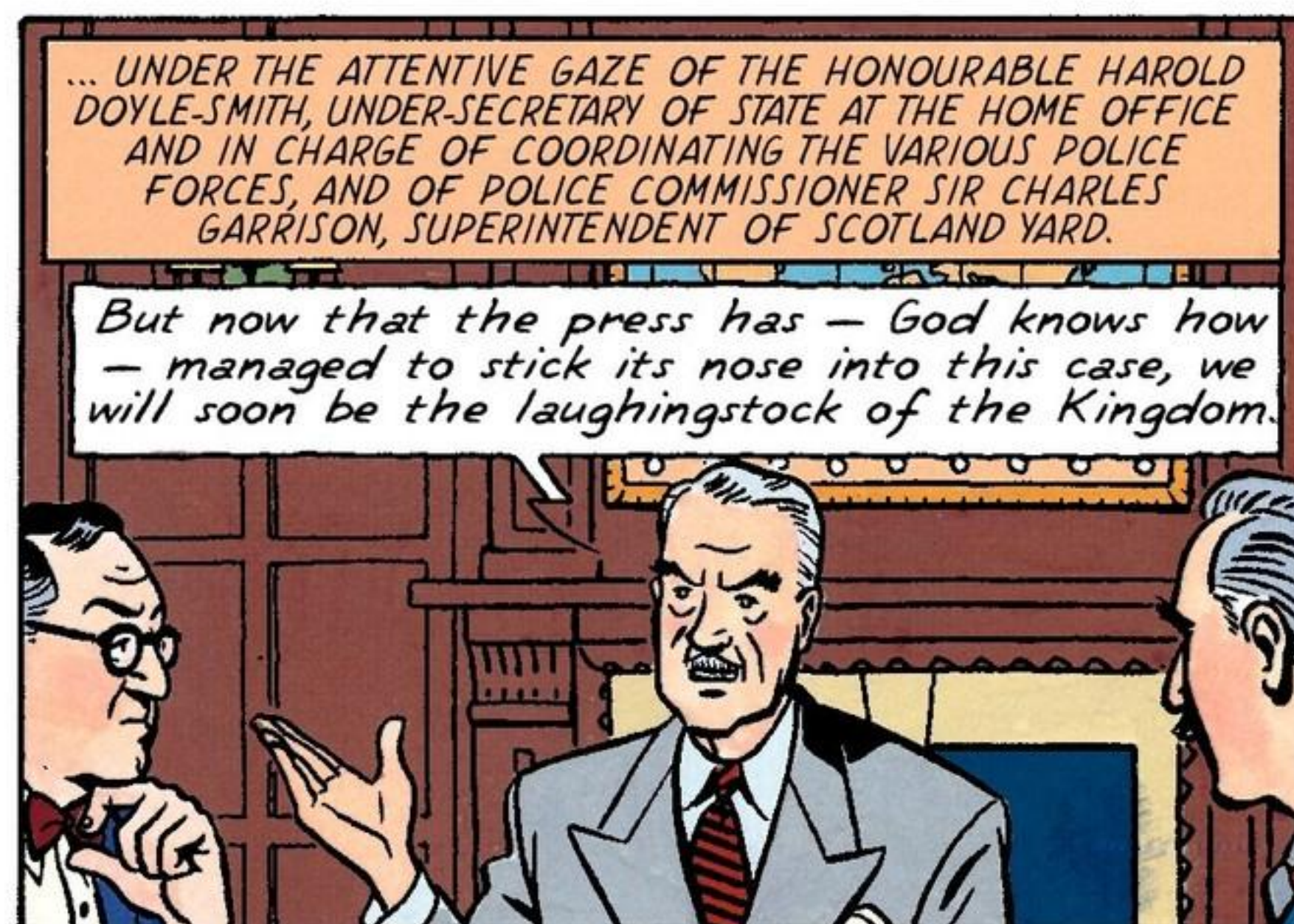
AT THE SAME INSTANT, AN IMPORTANT MEETING IS BEING HELD AT THE SEAT OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, INSIDE SCOTLAND YARD. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE.

This time, gentlemen, enough is enough...



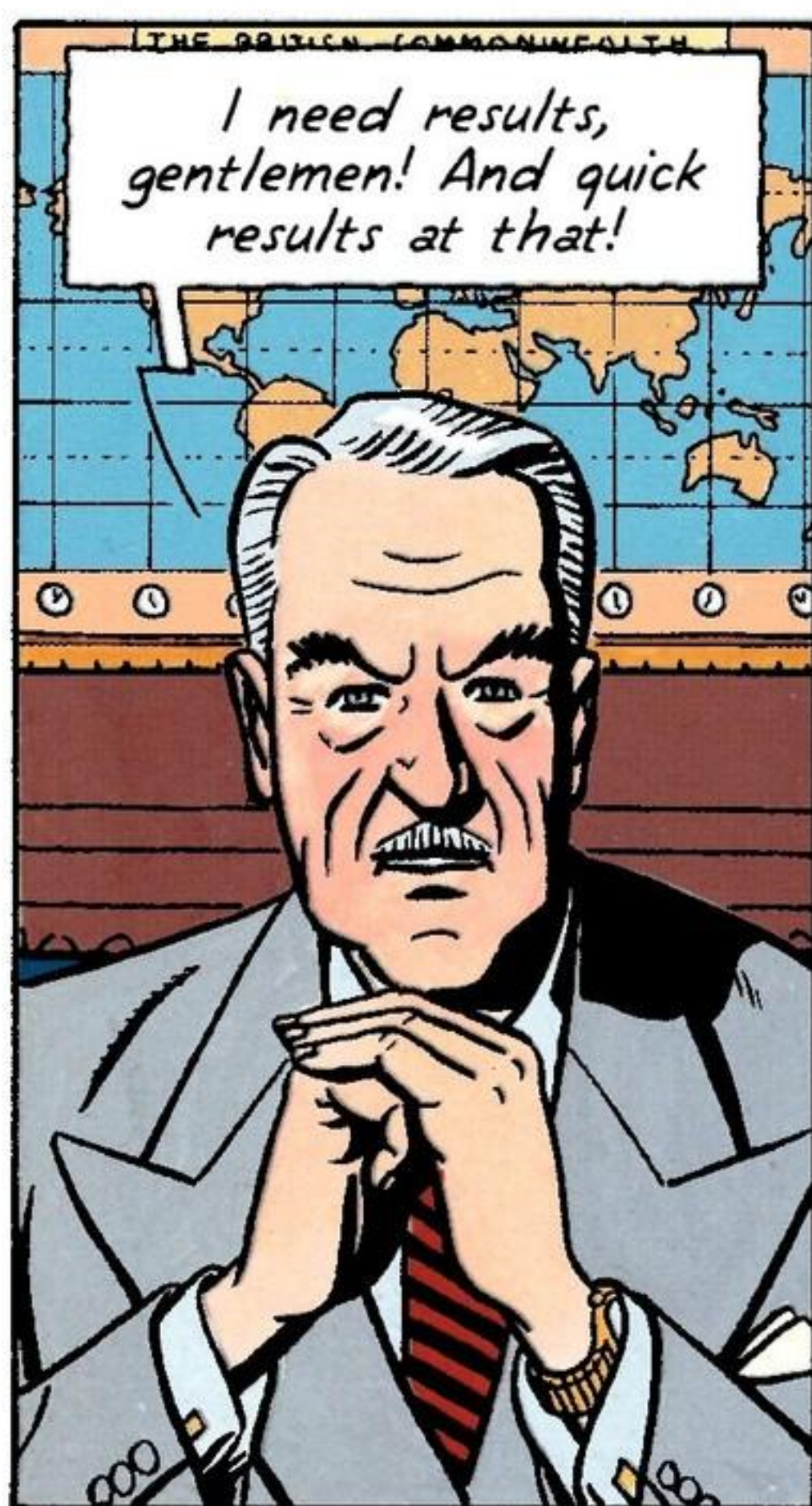
COLONEL DORIAN CARTWRIGHT, DIRECTOR OF THE I.S., IS GIVING FREE REIN TO HIS BITTERNESS...

We have been attempting to bring down this blasted network for months, with absolutely no success to this day.

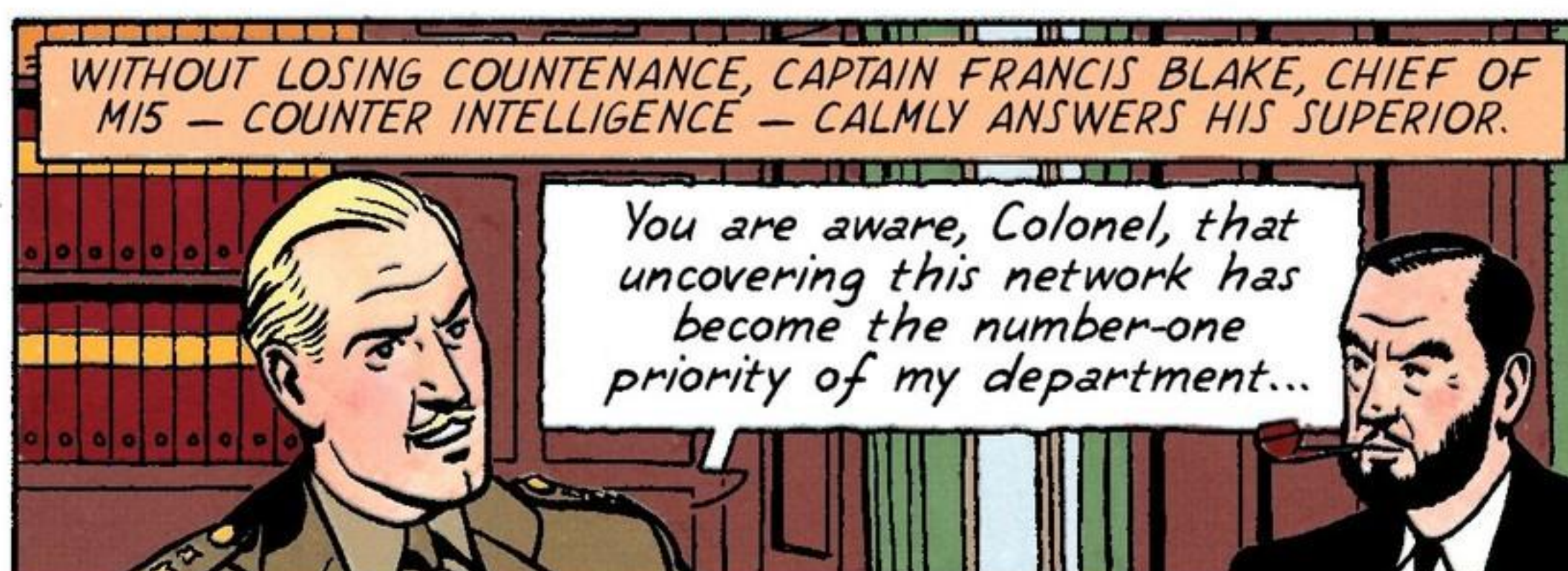


... UNDER THE ATTENTIVE GAZE OF THE HONOURABLE HAROLD DOYLE-SMITH, UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE AT THE HOME OFFICE AND IN CHARGE OF COORDINATING THE VARIOUS POLICE FORCES, AND OF POLICE COMMISSIONER SIR CHARLES GARRISON, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCOTLAND YARD.

But now that the press has - God knows how - managed to stick its nose into this case, we will soon be the laughingstock of the Kingdom.

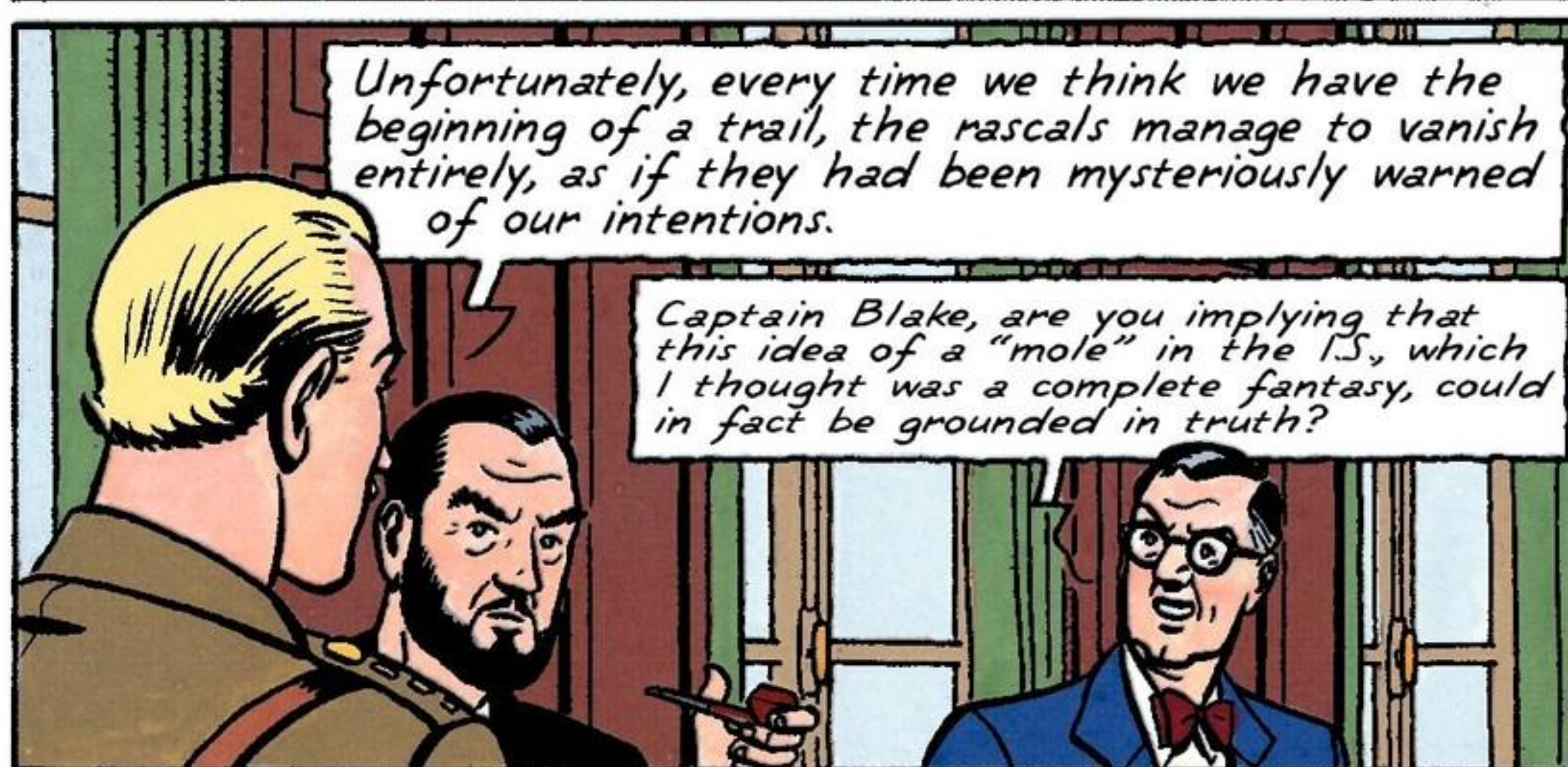


I need results, gentlemen! And quick results at that!



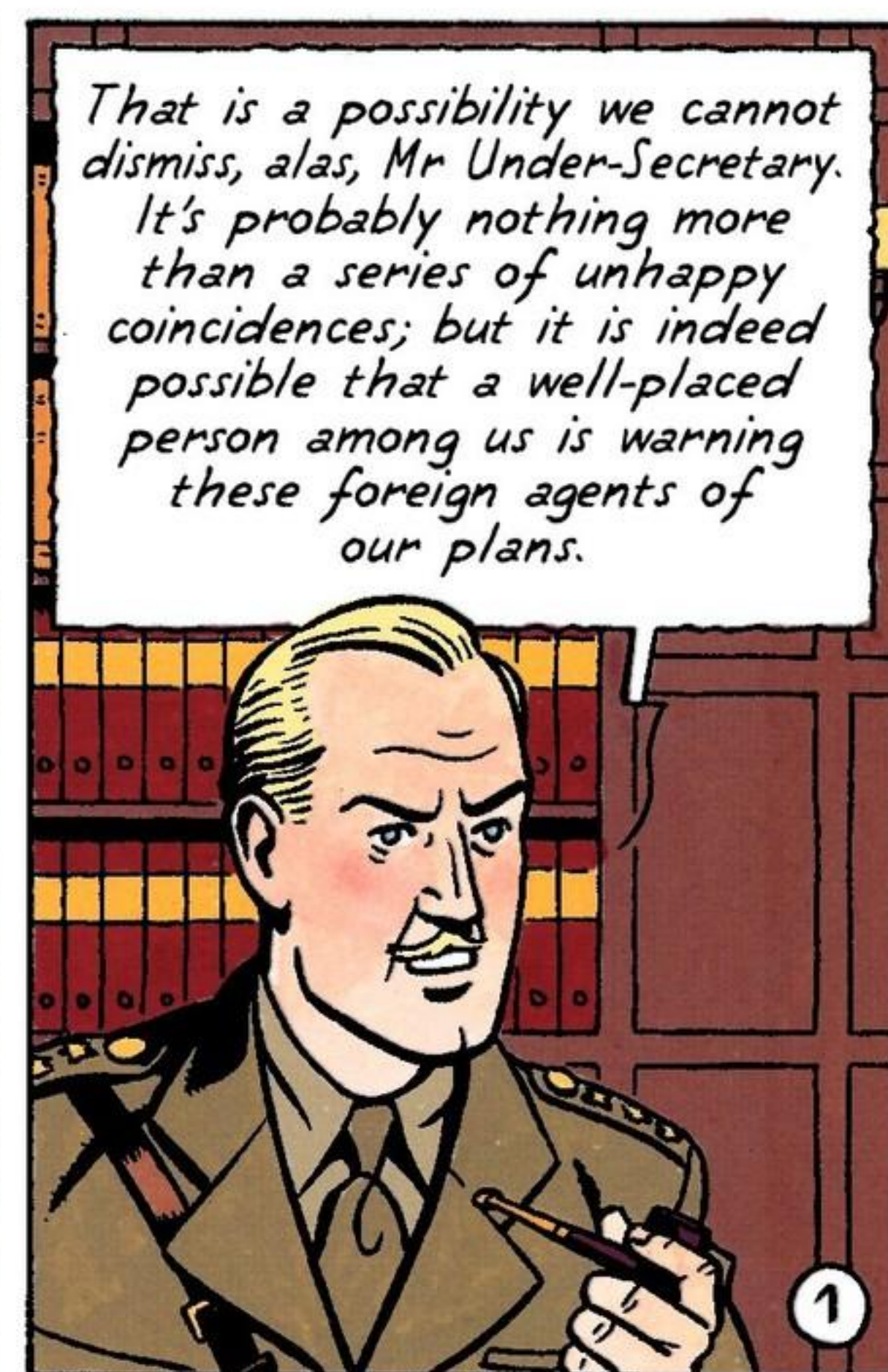
WITHOUT LOSING COUNTENANCE, CAPTAIN FRANCIS BLAKE, CHIEF OF MIS - COUNTER INTELLIGENCE - CALMLY ANSWERS HIS SUPERIOR.

You are aware, Colonel, that uncovering this network has become the number-one priority of my department...



Unfortunately, every time we think we have the beginning of a trail, the rascals manage to vanish entirely, as if they had been mysteriously warned of our intentions.

Captain Blake, are you implying that this idea of a "mole" in the I.S., which I thought was a complete fantasy, could in fact be grounded in truth?



That is a possibility we cannot dismiss, alas, Mr Under-Secretary. It's probably nothing more than a series of unhappy coincidences; but it is indeed possible that a well-placed person among us is warning these foreign agents of our plans.

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine *Tintin* was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.



ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION		
1	1950	Le secret de l'Espadon, T1
2	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T2
3	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T3
4	1954	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1
5	1955	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2
6	1956	La marque Jaune
7	1957	L'énigme de l'Atlantide
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores
9	1962	Le piège diabolique
10	1967	L'affaire du collier
11	1971	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T1
12	1990	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)
13	1996	L'affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)
14	2000	La machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)
15	2001	L'étrange rendez-vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)
16	2003	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)
17	2004	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)

CINEBOOK EDITION		
		The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
		The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
		The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
1	2007	The Yellow "M"
12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
		The Time Trap
7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2
4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
8	2010	The Voronov Plot
5	2009	The Strange Encounter
9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2

Original title: La malediction des trente deniers tome 1

Original edition: © Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud – Lombard S.A.) 2009
by J. Van Hamme, R. Sterne & C. De Spiegeleer
www.dargaud.com
All rights reserved

English translation: © 2012 Cinebook Ltd

Translator: Jerome Saincantin
Lettering and text layout: Imadjinn
Printed in Spain by Just Colour Graphic

This edition first published in Great Britain in 2012 by
Cinebook Ltd
56 Beech Avenue
Canterbury, Kent
CT4 7TA
www.cinebook.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84918-125-9

